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Synod 2003 meets in Sioux Center ... p.16

First Dutch settlement in Alberta p.10

58th year of publication

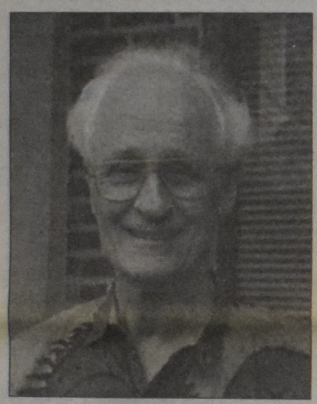
'Boasting of our weakness' in Indonesia

A Conversation with Jesuit Philosopher Franz Magnis-Suseno on Christian-Muslim Relations

by Alex Buchan

Professor Franz Magnis-Suseno is a leading Jesuit philosopher in Indonesia. For many years, he has been a major figure in Indonesian politics, participating in the influential Forum Democrasi during the Suharto years, where reformers such as Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) and Amien Rais discussed ways to bring democracy to Indonesia.

A confidante of many leading political figures, he finds himself many times in the odd position of having taught them and their children at his Jakarta school.



Jesuit Franz Magnis-Suseno

Magnis-Suseno is also well-known in Indonesia as a writer and journalist, and is on the forefront of dialogue between Muslims and Christians. Compass Direct correspondent Alex Buchan interviewed him in Jakarta in March. Excerpts from that interview follow.

Compass: From your vantage point as a political insider and one heavily involved in Muslim-Christian dialogue, how is the relationship between Christianity and Islam in Indonesia at the moment?

Franz Magnis-Suseno: There have been some remarkable developments in the relationship between Christians and Muslims lately. For instance, when Muslim leaders said, "We must defend our Iraqi brothers," there was no accompanying anti-Christian rhetoric. This was because for many months, the leaders of the two big Muslim organizations, Muhammadiyah and the Nahdatul Ulama (NU), stressed, "We must make clear this is not a religious war. We are against the war solely because the reasons are unjustified, and the problem should be resolved by peaceful means."

This is significant in itself, but the NU leader went further, creating a delegation of Muslim and Christian leaders – a Catholic cardinal and a Protestant leader – to travel around Australia and Europe calling for peace. There was a picture of the Catholic cardinal and the leader of the NU with the pope that received enormous coverage. It demonstrated to many Indonesians that the religions were united. And remember, this initiative came from the Muslims.

Compass: How did this happen, since for many months those outside Indonesia just heard the terrible news of Muslim-Christian war in Ambon and assumed things were getting worse?

Suseno: Well, this Ambon war has died down a little. Of course there are still places where a Christian or a Muslim cannot enter and get out alive; but since Laskar Jihad left, there have been no major clashes.

Compass: Why did they pull out? Was it because of the international pressure in the wake of the Bali bombings?

Suseno: It is still a mystery. The Bali bombing was on a Friday. On Saturday, Laskar Jihad dissolved,

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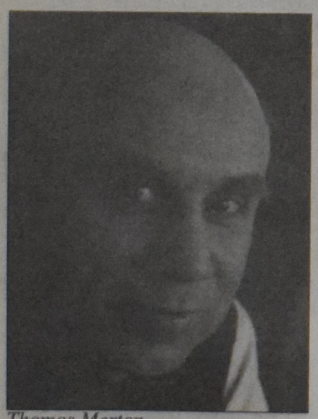
Conference revives prolific monk Thomas Merton



Thomas Merton

Peter Schuurman

"The Hawk's Dream: Thomas Merton's Sacred Landscapes" was the title of the eighth conference of the International Thomas Merton Society at the University of British Columbia held June 5-7.

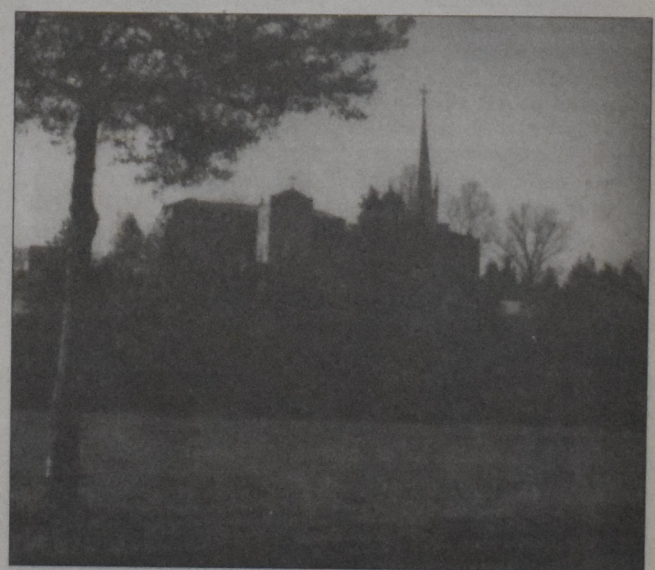
The title "Hawk's Dream" is a reference to the survival of "ancient wisdom", taken from a poem by Robinson Jeffers, whom Merton dubbed "the Pacific Blake." The subtitle "Sacred Landscapes" was chosen because Merton had always connected spirit and place. In fact, while on the California coast once, he wrote that what appears in nature reveals a piece of our interior landscape. "Thou art that," he said to himself as he looked at a mountain, half-obscured in mist.

Thomas Merton (1915-1968) has been celebrated as "one of the few authentic spiritual masters America has produced." He is the orphaned bohemian who decided to become a Trappist monk at age of 26, and made his story a bestseller in his first major work, *The Seven Story Mountain* (1948). Since then over 70 books have been published under his name, and over 381 titles stand as commentaries on them. The International Thomas Merton Society (since 1987) has dedicated itself to promoting these works through conferences, retreats, chapter meetings across the globe, and through research grants and scholarships.

He so loved the world

Merton was born in France, educated in England, and lived the whole of his adult life in a Trappist (Cistercian) monastery in Kentucky called *Gethsemani*. His mother, an American artist, died when he was six, his New Zealand

*...see **Thomas Merton**, p.3*



Gethsemani monastery

News

Indonesia

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but made it clear they dissolved on the (previous) Wednesday. They said they already had people back on a ship at the time of the bombing. Well, I don't know, but it must have had something to do with it.

Compass: Generally, has the conduct during the lead-up to the Iraq war resulted in better Muslim-Christian relations here, or did it start before that?

Suseno: The first visible step was a year ago when the leaders of Muhammadiyah and the Nahdatul Ulama met to make peace among themselves. NU was still extremely angry because Amien Rais [a former Muhammadiyah leader] had deposed Gus Dur [Abdurrahman Wahid, the former president and long-standing leader of the NU]. There was a real danger that NU supporters would attack Muhammadiyah facilities.

Two weeks later after making peace between themselves, they invited the leaders of other religions, including the Roman Catholic cardinal and myself, to the headquarters of the NU and formed a National Peace Coalition for Internal Peace. This was actually all in consequence of the Afghan war. But it was the first big Muslim initiative that embraced the Christians.

The main proof of it working was when we had the special session of the People's Congress in July. Leaders of both organizations came out against formalizing sharia. Attacks on churches have decreased very much. There is, on the other hand, an attempt to introduce sharia on a local and covert level. Also, in Muslim religious instruction, they are always told not to have contact with anyone of another religion. So it is not that everything is suddenly okay, but it is better.

Compass: The headlines are always terrible, especially on Ambon.

Suseno: Yes, the problem so often is that Muslims only report the worst about Christians, and vice versa. I read *Sabila*, an extremist Islamic magazine, and it is full of terrible stories of atrocities committed by Christians against Muslims. Some are true, most are not.

Compass: What is the status of Islamic extremism in the country?

Suseno: Extremely difficult to answer. The extremists are not growing, but they did come out of their holes in recent years. The good news is that the leaders of the NU and Muhammadiyah said, "We do not want Islamic discourse in Indonesia high-jacked by the extremists." Now after the Bali bombing, the extremists have gone back into their holes. We had hardly any demonstrations against America with the Iraq crisis. So something has changed. The extremists are on the defensive.

The problem is that our democracy is still threatened by corruption, and if the economic situation gets worse, then extremist solutions always get more interesting for people.

Compass: It is true that, before Christians are persecuted, their persecutors have to believe a lie about them. For example, in India the lie is that Christians forcibly evangelize Hindus. After swallowing this, the extremists then persecute Christians. What's the lie here?

Suseno: Same here: We forcibly convert Muslims, they claim. I argue by saying that we are respectful and give a choice always. Also I say to them, look at the official statistics. Since 1961, Christians in Indonesia have grown by only two percent, compared to 12 percent (growth) of the population. So a two percent growth over 40 years, that's not much to worry about. I tell Muslims, of course there is proselytizing, but put it into context. This modest growth does not deserve extremist reactions.

Compass: Some evangelicals say the figure is 23 percent already, and it's going to be 50 percent in the next 20 years.

Suseno: This is very dangerous. I actually hear these crazy figures quoted by the Muslims. They say, "The Protestants have a 10-year plan to make Indonesia Christian." To claim Indonesia is over 20 percent Christian today is a huge shift, and would surely have been detected by government, if true. Protestant evangelicals play up statistics, claiming there are more than there are. Catholics tend to play them down. For example in Jakarta, Roman Catholic statistics are 30 percent lower than the official government figure. But to boast through statistics is wrong. The only thing we should boast about as Christians is our weakness.

Compass: Looking back on the Christian-Muslim conflicts on Poso and Ambon, is this a good time to reflect on what really caused them, underneath all the propaganda?

Suseno: It's still difficult to get back to the real causes. I think in Poso it began with rivalry between regional parties in 1998, whereas in the Moluccas (Malukus) it began with the association of Muslim intellectuals under Habibie. The reasons themselves are very complicated. The point is, though, they are usually not religious. But they get boiled down and simplified: Christians against Muslims. Then they feed on longstanding suspicions and bad feelings and internalize the difficult history that always exists between groups. You get the old stuff coming up–the Crusades, Colonialism. It becomes an ideological war, when in the beginning it was much more complex.

Compass: Some argue that Islam has no real theology of defeat. For example, one thinks of the statements of Osama bin Laden, and how he harks back to 80 years ago when the Western powers rolled back the empire of the Ottomans.

Suseno: It goes deeper. Muslims have no theology of the cross. When Christians are hit, killed and so forth, we can accept it because Jesus taught us that being defeated is still a way of overcoming.

Compass: If that is the theological reality, how can there be peace?

Suseno: The only way out is through ideas of human rights and freedom of religion. Many Muslims like Gus Dur talk this way. I sometimes have exchanges with hard-line Muslims on this question. One once said, "If someone really has the call of God to go to another religion, then we would have to let him go, because his highest duty is to be obedient to God." So there is some hope, but that is rare.

Compass: But surely our Western notion of religious toleration is no use in this, because it is based on the idea that you tolerate religion because it is a public irrelevance. Can Indonesia find a model where the West has failed?

Suseno: It has already. We have found it, if you count out the extremists. The big religious groups have said, "Religion is normal, and as regards the state, we work out the public morality with the inputs of all the religions." So there is a religious pluralism at the moment. I use the expression that the majority should not bully the minority, but promote their well-being, and the minorities should be sensitive to the feelings of the majority. They should not provoke. For instance, if Muslims want Friday to be the free day, I would say, "Well, why not?" I would not make a big fight about it. This is how it goes.

Compass: Christians are concerned about a proposed law that would require Muslims attending Christian schools to receive religious instruction in Islam. What is your view on this?

Suseno: Up to now, Christians have defended the right to give only Christian instruction in their schools. This has been under attack from Muslims for some time, and at least in some Catholic schools, Muslims have already been exempted from Christian studies and allowed to receive religious instruction in their own faith.

Personally I disagree with the stance of my church in opposing the introduction of this law. I have long pressed that Muslims in our schools should be allowed to receive Islamic instruction, because in Vatican II we said it was a human right that parents should determine what religious instruction their children get. We must give this freedom. In India, Pakistan, and Nepal, pupils of other religions in Catholic schools are taught in the religion their parents nominate. If we had allowed this here, we could have been able to choose the Muslim teachers. Now this law will allow the government to decide who the teachers may be. Our pupils could be sent off to Muslim instructors who may be very close-minded.

Compass: Does this apply to Christian Bible schools?

Suseno: No, the law is only about Muslim students. In my place of higher education, we have 15 percent Muslim, and we choose the Muslim instructors. The Christians even go to (the classes) to gain understanding of the Muslim faith, and vice versa. It is an excellent situation.

Compass: How goes the process of reforming Indonesia?

Suseno: We are just muddling through. But in a situation when millions are out of work, it's not enough to muddle through. Will democracy succeed or not? If democracy succeeds, I am optimistic that extreme Islam will never get a majority here. If it does not succeed, those who appear to have decisive solutions are welcomed back.

For me, the central problem is corruption. Corruption makes our legal system bad, infecting the police and military. Then, economics cannot recover. This government is not so corrupt, but Megawati is completely insensitive. She likes to go on shopping sprees while millions starve. The rich are getting very rich again. If this massive inequality is not solved, it could make for more radicalization.

Compass: What can Western churches learn from the Indonesian experience of Christianity?

Suseno: That the church should not be defensive, but missionary. Not in the sense of trying to get more adherents, but to spread the message of Christ. Be happy for the moment at being a minority and speaking out for justice, peace and healing that Christ brings.

Also, we show how it is possible to be open to other religions. I am not a pluralist. I don't believe all religions are the same, or all true. I believe Jesus is *the* way not *a* way. But you can be open to other religions with that stance, esteem them, learn from them, work with them. Our message is not to allow Islam to become the big enemy in an apocalyptic sense. Sure, Islam has always had a terrorist fringe, but it has never been the majority. Look at Muslims like Jesus would look at them, with compassion, integrity and love.

News

Thomas Merton

...continued from p.1

born father (also an artist) died when he was 15, and his only brother died fighting with the Canadian Air Force in the second World War. This dramatic and cross-cultural personal history provides rich soil for his subsequent decades of reflection and writing from his hermitage near the monastery.

The paradox of his life is that while he tried so vehemently to flee the world and secure himself in the religious life of a monastery, few Christian writers have had such a profound interaction with American cultural life. Merton's writings, drawings, photographs, and poetry are all creations in conversation with the world outside the walls of the hermitage he moved into near Gethsemani Abbey. This is because what stood at the heart of Merton's works was nothing less than the incarnation of Christ, the divine made manifest in the world for the world. Some may identify Merton with the ideals of solitude, but he was by no means other-worldly. "I love beer," he wrote, "and, by that very fact, the world."

Dr. Mary Jo Weaver (Indiana) started off the conference plenary sessions with a bang in her speech entitled "Conjectures of a Disenchanted Reader." While she admits being enchanted with Merton in her youth, she now rather brusquely named Merton as a neurotic, self-centered intellectual who "never had an unpublished thought." She smiled at the irony of the world-wide publication of comments of his such as, "I've finally got past self-consciousness." She rescued herself from what might have been an enraged audience by explaining that these weaknesses were his strength, and that a spiritual explorer such as Merton, a man who made an East-West bridge and gave words to the homelessness we all feel, could only accomplish what he did if he was egotistical and fearless. Merton's genius was this, she concluded: "You don't have to leave the world to find sacred space; the world *is* sacred space."

The pains of solitude

Douglas Burton-Christie (L.A.) in his plenary "A Wild and Desolate Solitude" critiqued Merton's writing on solitude.

Merton and the Dalai Lama in Tibet

While Merton named solitude as a place where identity was refined and prepared for community, Burton-Christie, while drawing examples from St. Anthony and Jesus, insisted that the reality of the experience is ultimately one of torment and terror. "Solitude clears a space in our consciousness so our wounds can surface, and be healed," he explained. "It is engaging your life more deeply and honestly, not an escape from pain."

In a roundtable panel discussion entitled "Merton and the East" three Buddhist scholars debated the adequacy of Merton's attempts to understand and find a bridge to Asian thought. Roger Corless, Lucien Miller, and Joseph Raab seemed to agree that Merton understood Buddhism and Zen quite well for his time, given the poverty of related scholarship in the sixties. Dr. Corless declared that Merton saw Zen's elusive and paradoxical path as a helpful way of sweeping away the idolatry that may arise when we routinely picture and name God in concrete terms. Still, Corless maintained that Merton understood "in Christianity God is ultimate reality, while in Buddhism, reality is ultimate."

James Finley (Santa Monica) received spiritual direction from Thomas Merton for six years. His plenary session consisted of memories of Merton and reflection on his mystical spirituality. Merton's genius, he said, was his invitation to pause and wonder in the midst of ordinary life and remark to oneself, "This is holy." "Merton doesn't tell you what to do," he insisted. "He only requires that you live your life honestly. And when you are not living honestly, to be honest about not living honestly." He also prescribed living with a contented uncertainty. Merton said to him once, "The most important thing in your life you don't know; and you don't need to know it, because God loves you." With regards to the conference, he ended by saying, "We are missing Thomas Merton if all that we do is set up 'Thomas Merton.' His whole point was to see the mystery of ourselves in God."

Beyond Translative Faith

The final plenary speaker was Richard Rohr (OFM, New Mexico). In his speech entitled "Thomas Merton's Shift: Critical and Transformative Spirituality," he declared that Merton has always been celebrated as the one who re-introduced the contemplative Christian tradition to the West. But Merton did much more than that, said Rohr: he offered the possibility of critical thinking in the area of spirituality, a spirituality that is not just translative, but truly and radically transformative. Merton did not offer comfort, but revolution, continued Rohr, a spirituality not for "fortifying the separate [religious] self, but shattering it."

Devotional practice may lead to the safe, sure, superior self. But Merton led us not to pious thoughts, explained Rohr, but to a whole different mind. Faith is not believing and defending certain things to be true, but the opposite: living with not-knowing and getting by on grace, trust, surrender, and action. It is not only the freedom not to know, but the freedom not to need to know. While building up our religious self is often where we start, Rohr insists that much of it slides into a very subtle idolatry – of language, ritual, and even dress. Merton's call is fundamentally this: keep yourself from idols, even pious ones. Don't trivialize God with religious jargon: weep or kneel.

What is so attractive about Merton, concluded Rohr, was that we were able to watch him grow up. His idealistic bohemian days, his zealous, arrogant Catholic beginnings, his romantic floundering with a nurse in his later years — these "selves" are all named, let go, and then forgiven. "His journey was the common journey," ended Rohr, "even though we ourselves did not believe it."

This conference of 300 was mostly made up of older, literate, Roman Catholic Americans, but beyond this majority was a very mixed minority. Said J.C. Armbruster, a Quaker environmentalist from Olympia, Washington, "This was a great opportunity to meet other seekers. That's what I've noticed about these people. They are all seekers."

Merton has been embraced and owned by a great variety of people across the globe. There are numerous web sites from various countries dedicated to the promotion of Merton's writings in different languages. For example, see the Dutch site, "Thomas Merton in De Lage Landen" at http://users.belgacom.net/merton/index/htm.

"So I will disappear."

Merton died in 1968 in Bangkok while on an extended visit to the East. After giving a lecture in the heat of the day, he went to his room for a shower. It is assumed he slipped in the tub and grabbed the short-circuited electric fan he had placed nearby. He was only 53 years old. Incidentally, the final words in his last lecture (in reference to discussions on the obliteration of the 'false self') were: "So I will disappear."

Little did he know that his books, and an international society, would keep him alive for decades to come.

See page 6 for excerpts of the writings of Thomas Merton.

**Note: The photos used were taken from the book entitled "Thomas Merton", written by Jennifer Fisher Bryant and published by Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, USA.*

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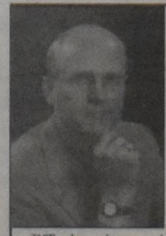

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Editorial

Coming to you on the web from Sioux Center, Iowa....

CRC Synod, usually held on the tree-shaded campus of Calvin College, was held this year on the campus of Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa. Alas, I think the corn wasn't yet tall enough to offer shade from the scorching Iowa sun.

These are the sort of jokes we, the alumni of Dordt College, like to make about our alma mater. Actually, one of the most vivid memories that my ageing brain retains is of my arrival in Sioux Center to a main street overshadowed by mighty elms that canopied the entire street. After 40 hours crossing the Sinai desert of Saskatchewan, Manitoba and the Dakotas, I was beholding Paradise. Many of those elms are gone from main street now, but the rest of the town still has plenty of grand trees that offer cool shade on a hot day in June.

Gone, too, from main street is the cafe where you poured your own coffee and dropped your dime in a cup and took out your own change.

Gone is the jewelry store where I bought the engagement ring for my wife with a bagful of crumpled one- and five-dollar bills that I'd earned shoveling manure and unloading boxcars. I'll never forget how Van Gelder chuckled as he smoothed out the bills while he counted them, and how my heart sank when it suddenly dawned on me that I hadn't allowed for the sales tax. Without saying a word, however, the man adjusted the price so that it matched exactly the number of bills that emerged from my paper bag. (Money is magical, isn't it? Transforming manure into a diamond ring.)

Gone is the bank manager (Te Paske) at Central Bank, who gave me a loan when I needed it, and when I repaid it several months later didn't charge me a cent of interest.

Gone is the doctor who straightened my nose (well, mostly) after my face was rearranged during a game of touch football. He wouldn't bill me afterwards.

Gone is Prof. Nick van Til, who sacrificed his own academic ambitions to teach dozy kids everything from music, sociology, political science, and history to philosophy, his first love – sometimes at 7 in the morning.

Expanding your vision

Even in Sioux Center, Iowa, the town where in the 60s no one locked the doors to their homes and everyone left the keys in their cars, things have changed. Even in the town where, if you worked it right, you could often get an invitation to Sunday dinner (especially if you were a Canadian), things are not as firm and fixed as they used to be.

And as things have changed over the years, ordinary folk from towns like Sioux Center as well as from big cities like Toronto have gathered every year to hear what the Word of God has to say to the saints who worship him in congregations all over North America and who are struggling to remain faithful in a rapidly changing world where they are called to witness to God's unchanging love.

Sitting through a solid week of reports from agencies and debates about study committee reports may sound like about as much fun as figuring your income taxes, but, no, it is actually invigorating, edifying, even inspiring. Sitting there, you become aware of all the work that is being done in your name as well as in the name of Jesus Christ by numerous persons, on many levels and in various ways in widely scattered parts of the world, and you feel your vision expanding.

So, I would have loved to go again this year, also to get a chance to walk the streets of Sioux Center and the campus of Dordt College once again. But our youngest son Jonathan was graduating the week of synod, and I had to be there. The reports on synod on pp.12 and 13 were written by a Dordt student, Andrew De Young, a veteran reporter of the *Dordt Voice*, an alumni paper, under the mentorship of Sally Jongsma, once a resident of lovely St. Catharines. I think he did a super job.

Even though I could not go to synod this year, I was able to eavesdrop on the debates through the miracle of the internet. This was a historic synod, for everything that happened on the floor of Synod 2003 was webcast. Anyone with a relatively up-to-date computer could not only hear but see what was happening. The faces weren't as clear as on t.v., but you could usually tell who was who. It was like watching a t.v. show that's badly out of focus.

Complications and oversimplifications

Two main impressions I was left with this year: first, that sometimes the delegates on the floor of synod were being rushed through debates on weighty, complicated issues, and second, that often in their speeches delegates were attacking positions that were not defended in the reports.

I often find myself doing the latter. Usually I don't realize I am doing it at the time. Attuned to debates wafting about in the media, I begin to formulate counter-arguments. And then when I hear someone speak, I turn him into the mouthpiece of some position that I've been itching to refute. Later on, however, I realize that I oversimplified his position to score points.

That's what happened on the floor of synod too. Although I thought the report on issues raised by genetic engineering drew the lines too sharply (see CC June 9, p.18), it did not argue that a fertilized egg in a lab or in the freezer of a fertility clinic was a human baby and deserving of the same protection. Quite a number of delegates on the floor of synod wisely cautioned against such a position, adopted by many pro-life people in order to build an iron-clad argument against abortion at any stage and against experimenting with embryos. Although the latter is an admirable moral position, it may impose a moral standard that couples using in vitro fertilization to conceive would find almost impossible to live by. If that moral standard were dictated by Scripture, well and good, but many argued (convincingly, I think) that a fertilized egg in a dish (an unimplanted embryo) is something different than one growing in a mother's womb.

The synodical report said that too. Nevertheless, the report insisted, it is human life. It's not a carrot; you don't pluck out a few to make room for the others. As human life, it warrants respect and protection. That makes sense to me. But the question remains, how much protection?

What startled me was the number of men who rose on the floor of synod to speak from personal experience. They had needed help from a fertility clinic to have a baby. In the process, often a dozen or more eggs are fertilized in the lab because so many fail. The report stated that a couple must want as many babies as the number of eggs they allow to be fertilized. Synod wisely avoided going that far (see p.12).

"How did we get to the situation of having hundreds of thousands of embryos frozen, and then calling getting rid of them murder?" asked one delegate. A good question, but the report before synod never called it murder.

"Definition and exactitude will continue to elude us," cautioned another speaker. "We are dealing with an awesome mystery. Are we going to devote synodical time to every issue raised by the biosciences?" Another good question. How much guidance should we expect from synod? How detailed must it be, not only here but also in the political realm, especially with regard to defense?

Synod also felt the report on church support for Christian day schools too restrictive. The report argues that the vows spoken at baptism commit parents to Christian schools, said some critics of the report, and that doesn't wash with most members of the CRC. Several speakers said the report virtually recommended a takeover of Christian schools by the churches, violating sphere sovereignty. Another (mis)reading of the report argued against the idea that the schools should become mission posts in the narrow sense of saving souls. But the report uses "mission" in a much broader sense; however, it takes time to overcome such misunderstandings and clarify definitions, and this synod did not, it seemed to me, want to take that kind of time. At times, it displayed considerable impatience with the study committees it appointed.

But it also showed wisdom in not jumping to positions that unnecessarily bind the conscience of church members where Scripture does not. And perhaps delaying, revising and sending reports back to committee is more an act of patience than of impatience. It shows that synod is aware that the church is led less by the wisdom of synod than by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

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EDITORIAL TEAM & PRODUCTION STAFF
Editor: Harry der Nederlanden editor@christiancourier.ca;
Journalist, Layout Designer: Alan Doerksen journal@christiancourier.ca;
Circulation: Rose der Nederlanden **Subscriptions**@christiancourier.ca;
Accounts/Advertising Manager: Ineke Medcalf-Strayer accounts@christiancourier.ca

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Letters

Gay marriage is an oxymoron

I feel bad that my plate has been too full to address the current hot issue of same-sex "marriages." I finally found time yesterday to dig into the matter in order to provide some insights for my church family. The reason I feel bad is because I heard on yesterday's noon news that Parliament decided to bring in legislation to approve gay marriages. Though the position of Parliament has been made clear, let me nevertheless offer these thoughts with particular thanks to the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada for their work.

There are two other countries in the world that approve gay marriages – Belgium and its neighbor Holland. Yet Canada's decision is unique. Canada is the only country in the world to make same-sex "marriage" a rights-based issue. This is remarkable because international legal cases have consistently ruled that same-sex "marriage" is not a human rights issue. In fact, no court in the world has found that maintaining marriage as a heterosexual union is a violation of fundamental human rights.

As a Christian, my understanding of marriage is founded on the biblical account of the creation of man and woman in Genesis 1 and 2, and Jesus' own affirmation in Matthew 19. Christians therefore tend to define marriage as the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman, to the exclusion of all others. It is important to recognize, though, that this understanding of marriage is not restricted to Christianity. After an extensive study of the world's cultures and religions, Dr. Katherine Young of McGill University, Montreal, affirmed that all the world's major religions and all cultures and societies have from time immemorial recognized marriage as the union of male and female. She says, "'same-sex marriage' is an oxymoron, because it lacks the universal, or defining, feature of marriage according to religious, historical, and anthropological evidence."

Thus, marriage is not unique to Christianity and not just a religious institution; it has been recognized by all societies. Marriage is a social, cultural as well as a religious institution, and the relationship upon which human society is founded. This is why marriage has been recognized in law and public policy as the union between male and female.

This also means that marriage predates both the state of Canada and English common law upon which most of our legal system is based. Governments and the courts are not the creators of marriage; it is not a legal institution created by law. Marriage is rooted in the way we're created. It is based upon the biological reality that humanity exists in two sexes. Marriage expresses the complementarity of the sexes and thus requires both sexes. Yet marriage is more than sexual -- it is unitive (becoming "one flesh," Genesis 2:24) and is procreative even though it cannot be reduced to either of these, for marriage is possible between a man and a woman who choose not to or cannot procreate (due to infertility or old age). Marriage by nature is the supreme form of heterosexual bonding.

Do same-sex relationships need to be redefined as marriage to enjoy legal protection? No. Both Nova Scotia and Quebec have already instituted legal protections for civil partnerships. Marriage does not need to be redefined to accommodate such relationships. Definitions make distinctions in order to preserve the essence of something. The very definition of marriage distinguishes it from all other relationships. If Parliament does indeed go ahead with a redefinition of marriage, why should other domestic relationships be excluded? If the capacity to procreate no longer becomes a distinctive feature of marriage, why should sexual intimacy not also be eliminated? And why should polygamy continue to be illegal? (B.C. officials already refuse to prosecute open polygamists in Bountiful, located in the Kootenays, out of fear that courts will strike down existing laws against polygamy on constitutional grounds.)

This is why marriage should continue to be legally defined as the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman, to the exclusion of all others.

Walt Brouwer
Pastor of Christ Community Church

Modernize your seat, Dale

I would like to wish Rev. Cooper a wonderful trip as he travels from Grand Rapids to Alton, Iowa on the back of his beloved John Deer B. I hope he has modernized his tractor seat somewhat, it will be a hard ten hours a day otherwise. I would also advise him to use some kind of ear protection, seven days of this wonderful putt-putt-putt sound might otherwise render him "hearing challenged".

Have a great time Dale!

Fred Gietema.
Abbotsford,B.C.
(a former John Deere B tractor owner)

For a detailed **reply by Jonathan Chaplin to the letter from Transcona CRC** regarding the position of the Committee for Contact with the Government on same-sex unions, **see p.19**.

For an excellent article that reflects on the Iraq war and just war teachings by Calvin College professor David Hoekema, see www.calvin.edu/spark

For some excellent stories written by Christian authors, see www.dordt.edu/publications/arete

Pluralism and loving our neighbor

The Council of Transcona CRC Winnipeg (letters, June 9, 2003) brings up some important issues regarding the CRC's Committee for Contact with Government (CCG). However, Transcona's critique of CCG's contributions to the current debate surrounding homosexual marriage is hampered by a misunderstanding of pluralism. There can be legitimate debate on the application of pluralist principles to the issue of legal rights for homosexual citizens, as well as on the legitimacy of the principle itself. But in any case, defining it properly is crucial.

Pluralism is a particular way, informed by a normative vision, of dealing with genuine difference (plurality) on a political level. There are various types of plurality: associational (there are different types of human associations), contextual (there are different situations), and directional (there are different 'ultimate purposes' for things) (see *Pluralisms and Horizons* by Mouw and Griffioen). Pluralist positions contend that in many cases (but not all – clearly we can have only one speed limit) the state must allow for communities to live differently with legal protection tailored to their reality. Pluralist positions don't necessarily claim that all these differences ought to exist, but that the state ought to act in a way that deals justly with the reality in which they do exist.

While the CCG's submissions deal with associational plurality, in particular "types of interdependent relationships," it should be noted that, in its recognition of Catholic, Hindu, and Reformed Marriages, the state already recognized a plurality of directional orientations within marriage.

To understand why pluralism is given as a principle of the CCG, and why it is widely regarded as normative in Reformed circles, it is helpful to look at the issue of independent schools. The reformed school choice movements of past and present are based on the normative belief that it is not right for Reformed Christian children to be forced to attend a class taught by a Secular Humanist. But beyond this, according to the school choice movement, it is also wrong for a Catholic to be given no choice than be taught by a Reformed teacher, or an Orthodox Jew to be forced into a classroom taught from a Catholic worldview. The idea that a plurality of faith communities should receive state funding for their schools, not just our faith community, is a pluralist position. Pluralism denies that one size fits all, whether it be extreme (Taliban Fundamentalism) or supposedly "neutral" (liberalism).

Pluralism is not contrary to Christianity. When Christians in Sudan call their government to protect their right to practice their religion without fear of violence by making the claim that more than one religion should be allowed within its boarders, they are appealing to Christian pluralist principles. The political principle of pluralism (in its many forms – Catholic, Reformed, and Secular - there is directional plurality even here) is a living out of a normative vision that the state is not everything, and that it should not eradicate those citizens who hold different views or form different associations, including certain ones it may view as anti-normative. Nor should the state, in this vision, assimilate everyone into the ways of the majority (be it 'secular humanist,' Muslim, or even Christian), trivialize difference, or exclude particular groups from the protection of law.

I hope this sheds some light on why the CCG, and many others in the reformed community, thinks that pluralism is a faithful response to God's call to love our neighbor with our civil governments, given the reality of difference.

Robert Brink
St. Albert, AB

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Review

Thomas Merton, contemplative critic

Thomas Merton exerted a strong influence on students in the '60s and '70's, thus, at a time when I was a student. And I, too, was attracted to his writings, collecting several of his books, which are still in my library. Underlinings show what passages, many of them gems of compression, spoke to me most.

Like the existentialists, also influential at the time, Merton had a very strong sense of the phoniness, superficiality and unreality of allegedly solid, normal middle-class life in America. He was very adept at exposing its contradictions and hypocrisy, something that probably appeals to students of almost any time but which was especially part of student life in those counterculture days.

The two Matrix films are evidence that this sense of the unreality of normal, middle-class existence as it is lived in our society is still strong. But as Henri Nouwen in his short book about Merton points out, had Merton not gone beyond this critical, ironic stance, there would have been nothing remarkable about him. What Merton represented above all, however, was the decisive movement toward a clear alternative in the totality of his existence.

Here are some quotations – some selected by Peter Schuurman and some by me to whet your appetite for more of Merton.

Harry der Nederlanden

Tom in the sparsely furnished hermitage where he lived.

It is all very well to insist that man is a "social animal" – the fact is obvious. But that is no justification for making him a mere cog in a totalitarian machine – or in a religious one either, for that matter.

In actual fact, society depends for its existence on the inviolable personal solitude of its members. Society, to merit its name, must be made up not of numbers or mechanical units, but of persons. To be a person implies responsibility and freedom, and both these imply a certain interior solitude, a sense of personal integrity, a sense of one's own reality and of one's ability to give himself to society – or to refuse that gift.

Thoughts in Solitude

In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness...

I have the immense joy of being human, a member of the race in which God himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now that I realize what we all are. If only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.

Confessions of a Guilty Bystander

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Thoughts in Solitude

We put words between ourselves and things. Even God has become another conceptual unreality in a no-man's land of language that no longer serves as a means of communion with reality.

Thoughts in Solitude

When your tongue is silent, you can rest in the silence of the forest. When your imagination is silent, the forest speaks to you, tells you of its unreality and of the Reality of God. But when your mind is silent, then the forest suddenly becomes magnificently real and blazes transparently with the Reality of God. For now I know that the Creation, which first seems to reveal Him in concepts, then seems to hide Him by the same concepts, finally "is revealed in Him," in the Holy Spirit. And we who are in God find ourselves united in Him with all that springs from Him. This is prayer, and this is glory!

Entering the Silence: Becoming a Monk and Writer

By the reading of Scripture I am so renewed that nature seems renewed around me and with me. The sky seems to be a pure, a cooler blue, the trees a deeper green, light is sharper on the outlines of the forest and the hills and the whole world is charged with the glory of God and I feel fire and music in the earth under my feet.

The Sign of Jonas

I must look for my identity, somehow, not only in God but in other men. I will never be able to find myself if I isolate myself from the rest of mankind as if I were a different kind of being.

New Seeds of Contemplation

Contemplation is the highest expression of man's intellectual and spiritual life. It is that life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive. It is spiritual wonder. It is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being. It is gratitude for life, for awareness, and for being. It is a vivid realization of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent, and infinitely abundant Source. Contemplation is, above all, awareness of the reality of that Source.

New Seeds of Contemplation

(The best way to get Merton's books is to visit used bookstores.Look for the paperback versions issued by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Many are still in print.)

Respecting the diversity of creation

Review of *Political Visions and Illusions* by David Koyzis, Intervarsity Press.

Chris Bosch

Ideologies have great appeal. They help us vote; they help us decide which public policies are most important; and they help distinguish "us" from "them." Ideologies provide effective categories from which to make many if not all our important political, economic and social decisions. But what should be our response as Christians?

As David Koyzis points out in his book *Political Visions and Illusions*, some Christians may have little problem accommodating their religious beliefs to an ideology because ideologies invoke familiar biblical principles such as equity, individual freedom, and communal solidarity. However, when adherence to an ideology means that everything else is reduced to those principles and become subordinate to equity, freedom and solidarity, we must check this against other biblical norms such as diversity in creation and the sovereignty of God.

Idolatrous roots

Koyzis' project is to shed a purifying light on the idolatrous spiritual roots of some of our most cherished ideologies, noting the reductive tendencies inherent in each and offering an alternative that respects creational diversity and the sovereignty of God.

Political Visions and Illusions is a critical look at the political ideologies of liberalism, conservativism, nationalism, democracy and socialism. The analysis unfolds as responses to questions such as: What is the creational basis of an ideology? What facets of God's creation have they rightly focused on even as they have effectively deified them? What do they see as the source of evil and where do they locate the source of salvation? And, to what extent are they able to account for the distinct place of politics in God's world?

Koyzis' overarching response is unequivocal: "Each of these ideologies goes astray by effectively according it a status of ontological ultimacy [ascribing creational status and normativity] and elevating it over the rest of creation." Although Koyzis acknowledges that each ideology celebrates a creational norm that is not idolatrous in its own right, i.e., individual responsibility,

continued on p.7...

Opinion

..continued from p.6

historical continuity, communal solidarity, political participation and economic equity, the subordination of creational norms to one overarching norm does not do justice to the diversity that is inherent in God's creation.

Non-reductive thinking

The other half of Koyzis' project is to offer an alternative to ideological thinking. In his words, "the one nonidolatrous alternative left is a kind of *pluralism* that spurns the reductive monisms of the ideologies." The word 'pluralism' is italicized in the sentence by the author because it is heavy with meaning and is the capstone of his thesis. In explaining what he means by pluralism, Koyzis aligns himself with other neocalvinist thinkers such as Kuyper and Dooyeweerd, who have promoted a pluralism that recognizes the sovereignty of God over all creation and the differentiated responsibilities bestowed on each aspect of creation.

Most impressively, Koyzis weaves his dominant themes (the idolatrous nature of ideologies and his alternative based in the Christian worldview of creation, fall, redemption) with careful attention to how and why ideologies emerge, why Christians should be on their guard against such ideological advances and how Christians might mitigate the tendencies of ideologies by adopting a Biblical approach.

Inoculation against ideology

Christian educators should be most interested in *Political Visions and Illusions* for at least three reasons. First, uncovering ideologies for what they really are also uncovers the subtle covert operations for our hearts and minds. Reading this book reminds one of the ruminations of the mentor to his protégé in C.S. Lewis' book, *The Screwtape Letters*. You will recall that in this story one of Satan's chief minions is coaching his underling in the subtle art of manipulation, syncretism and accommodation. Lewis' story reminds us that the battle for hearts and minds is rarely a full frontal attack but more typically a secretive infiltration into one's reason and common sense. Koyzis' book is an inoculation – a preventative measure – against the subtle attractions of an ideology's reductive program.

Recognizing spiritual, cultural and structural diversity

The second reason for Christian educators to get excited about the themes in this book is for its intellectual "call to arms." There is an understated petition to all Christians to look more closely at their own tradition for answers that are otherwise sought in ideologies. Educators and students alike will be encouraged to take up debate and formulate action that invites a non-ideological approach to political decision-making that honors God in the first place and expands the true meaning of freedom that can only be found in pluralism. As Koyzis explains, it is a pluralism that recognizes spiritual, cultural and structural diversity in creation and that is steeped in a worldview that comprehensively answers humanity's most important questions about creation, fall and redemption.

Politics another means of worshiping

Koyzis' emphasis on the important role of politics as another means of worshiping God is another unmistakable theme in this book and the third reason to reveal its message to students. The ancient philosopher, Aristotle, considered humans to be 'political animals' because he believed that the deliberation of ideas about how to bring about the common good would promote the reality of a virtuous city. Today our dominant political unit is the state and not so much the city, but the meaning and task of politics remains the same: the promotion of the common good. Students and teachers should wrestle with this meaning of politics and rediscover the art of deliberation and engagement with ideas that realize the creational norms for public policy, international relations, and political theorizing.

There is no doubt that this book will be on the reading list of my students. I look forward to the opportunities to challenge my students to rethink strongly held political, social and economic beliefs by asking them to evaluate the spiritual moorings of these ideas. If we can agree that these ideas do not share the same spiritual direction that the Bible calls us, we will be challenged to adopt Koyzis' Biblical alternative to see if it will have the practical, real life application that the author hopes it will.

This is the nature of scholarship after all, that we receive new ideas from relevant thinkers and test them in the laboratory of the real. The real is the political world where ideas are stretched by special interest and contracted by compromise in a societal landscape that is largely concerned with what counts as appropriate public language and public policy. Christian students should come to know how to discern the spirits of their age and in response know how to address important issues from a Christian worldview. *Political Visions and Illusions* will do just that.

Chris Bosch is a Ph.D. candidate in Political Theory at the Institute for Christian Studies/Free University and employed by the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC). He lives in Oshawa, ON

Vancouver Comes Second

CAMPUS CULTURE

Peter Schuurman

One thing I've learned from the university is that worldview and place often shape each other. After five months of sabbatical on the west coast of Canada, I see that even more graphically. B.C. is, in many ways, a long way from Ontario. Allow me to illustrate.

"You from Ontario?" a middle-aged woman asked me as I chatted with my friend on Vancouver's Sky Train. "I came here from Ontario for a two week trip," and then she added with a knowing smile, "seventeen years ago."

The assumption is that anyone with even a modicum of love for life, after experiencing the mildness and majesty of the coast, could only choose to root themselves here for as long as breath continued to be gifted to them. To return, voluntarily, to the ambitious, fast-paced frigidity and humidity of Ontario can only be a sign that one has been taken in by the dark shadow of CN Tower capitalism.

A friend with a cottage at Whistler complains, "If I only had a quarter for every time I've heard a sentence begin, 'The thing about Ontario is...,' well, then I'd own the resort." Visiting Ontarians feel compelled to explain *why* they remain out East, as if residency anywhere east of Alberta requires some rational justification.

A Sabbath Lifestyle

It is true that there are more restaurants per capita here than elsewhere in Canada. Life is definitely more laid-back, and a leisure-filled life is the expectation. "In Ontario you live in order to work," I was told. "Here, we work in order to live." Residents are quick to point out that Whistler is the top ski resort in North America, and Vancouver has been rated, by the Mercer human resources company, half a point behind Zurich, Switzerland, as the world's most liveable city this year. The bicycle lanes, the multitude of volleyball courts lining such places as Jericho Beach, and the booming tourist industry seem to verify this.

The psychology behind some of these boasts, however, is revealing. I'm talking about masked resentment. Every once and awhile it slips from the lips of a Westerner that Ontario assumes it is the "Centre of the Universe." Westerners, for all their natural wonders and recreational delights, feel neglected, and even abused by the East. Many have left much of their family out East, but definitely not their loyalties.

I was chatting with one sweet elderly store owner about Americans boycotting Canadian goods during the Iraq invasion. She suddenly became quite irritated. "I didn't vote for those idiots out in Ottawa," she seethed. Similarly, I attended a lecture by Preston Manning, where he warned in his trademark scratchy voice, "Western Canada is getting economically and politically stronger and stronger. Soon you won't be able to elect a federal government without its consent..."

Look out, Ontario.

The Left Coast

Picture it this way: B.C. is out on the edge, or The Left Coast. North America is tilted downwards towards the West, and anything that is loose rolls down and lands on the coast. That comment was actually said more specifically about California, but it works for B.C., too.

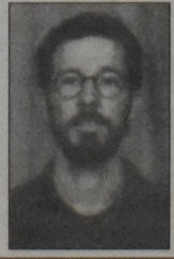
Politics, sexuality and religion come in many more varied colors out here. Anything goes. Crystals, Christ, or cannabis; its all on the menu. "It's the Rockies that divide North America," explained a friend. "Not the 49th parallel." That explains a lot. It seems it's only the "British" that kept this "Columbia" from becoming the 53rd state over a hundred and thirty years ago.

Further inland, away from the coastal nudist beaches, is the Bible Belt. The Canadian headquarters of American organizations such as Focus on the Family and Campus Crusade can both be found just east of Vancouver. To go east it seems, is to move to the right, and then, before you know it, you are in Klein's Alberta. You would think you couldn't move any further right, but Eves' Ontario is still hundreds of kilometres further down the road.

What I'm saying is B.C. is not only botanical beauty, boating and bald eagles. As an additional note, I have taken to gently reminding the proud Westerners I meet that this region is not called the Wet Coast for its fine micro-breweries. Dark Vancouver rain is what keeps the ocean so vast. Put differently, S.A.D. (Seasonal Affective Disorder) is a condition not to be envied. The February flower counts, Olympic Winter Games and wildlife super-parks are one thing. But they can keep all the dark clouds and drizzle.

The west is best. I won't argue with mountains. But after my sabbatical, I'm not going to stay here. You see, *the thing about Ontario is*... well, its *home*. We have family there. So we are ambling back east.

I would pack a few parks with me, if I could. But we take only photographs, and leave only footprints on the beach.



Peter Schuurman is currently on sabbatical from his campus chaplaincy work at Brock University, in St. Catharines, Ont.

Church

Archbishop of Canterbury says church unaltered by selection of gay bishop

Rowan Williams, the archbishop of Canterbury.

By Cedric Pulford

London (ENI) — The archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, has broken his silence over the controversial appointment of Jeffrey John, an openly gay priest, as a bishop of the Church of England by declaring that it does not alter the Anglican Communion stance on homosexuality.

Williams has previously expressed sympathy with homosexual relationships, but as leader of the Anglican Communion he has said he would uphold the decision of the 1998 Lambeth Conference of the world's Anglican bishops, which rejected "homosexual practice" as being "incompatible with Scripture".

In a message to Church of England bishops on Monday, Williams denied that the appointment of John "subverts current discipline or forecloses future discussion."

He assured the wider Anglican Communion that "we are not embarking on or colluding with any policy of unilateral local change."

According to unconfirmed press reports, Williams himself is planning to consecrate John as a bishop in Westminster Abbey on October 9.

The controversy over the appointment of John comes at the same time as rifts in the worldwide Anglican Communion opened over the election of another openly gay priest, Gene Robinson, as a bishop in the Diocese of New Hampshire, in the United States, and the blessing of a same-sex union in the Diocese of New Westminster, in Canada.

In Britain, the Church of England's leadership has been conducting a war of words in print.

James Jones, the bishop of Liverpool, on Saturday accused the bishop of Oxford, Richard Harries, who appointed John as one of his suffragans (assistants), of ignoring the need for "restraint by all parties" over the homosexuality issue.

"One of the strengths of the Church of England is its diversity, but that should not be mistaken for anything goes," Jones wrote in the Daily Telegraph. He is an evangelical who was tipped last year as a possible choice for archbishop of Canterbury.

Earlier, Jones was one of nine diocesan bishops – one fifth of the top leadership – who had protested in an open letter against John's appointment. In reply, eight diocesans supported the appointment.

Clergy who will serve under John's leadership are divided, according to a sample of priests in the Oxford diocese, with 29 supporting him and 20 opposed.

The issue has been made more complicated by John's avowal that his relationship with Grant Holmes, also a priest and his partner of 27 years, is a chaste one.

John, 50, has said that he accepts the 1991 ruling of Church of England bishops that homosexual acts are acceptable among laity but not clergy. Neither John nor Harries has given any indication of backing down.

The Sunday Times reported that liberal Anglicans hoped the John affair would force a resolution of the homosexuality issue, enabling many gay priests "to come out of the closet".

Richard Kirker, general secretary of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, told ENI that the controversy would "have a long-lasting impact for the good".

He added: "The experience with women priests [whom the Church of England admitted from 1994] suggests that claims of masses leaving the church because of gay priests are exaggerated."

Gay British bishop defends stance on homosexual relationships

Robert Nowell

LONDON (RNS) — In his first interview since being appointed bishop, Canon Jeffrey John has firmly defended his stance on homosexual relationships while pledging not to step out of line as a bishop. John, who has been named to be the bishop of Reading, England, said his relationship with another man, which began when he was an ordinand, "is a permanent thing" but "has not been sexually expressed for years."

He also said he and his partner have never had their relationship formally blessed, nor would he conduct a service of blessing for such a relationship.

"I would like the church to bless relationships based on that kind of covenant," he told Ruth Gledhill of *The Times*. "But I stand in a tradition which does respect the discipline and authority of the church. I would argue for it within the councils of the church, but the point of consensus has not been reached."

Citing the view that marriage reflects the covenant between God and his people, he said: "I believe that the mystery of covenant love actually can work for two people of the same sex just as much as it can work for a married couple."

To his regret, Bishop-elect John will not be ordaining any open and actively gay clergy. "The current discipline of the Church is set out in `Issues in Human Sexuality' (the 1991 report of the Church of England's House of Bishops which tolerates active homosexual relationships among the laity but not among the clergy), and that states that a sexually active gay relationship is not compatible with ordination.

"That is where the church is. Obviously I regret that personally. As a bishop I will have to abide by that. It is a matter of corporate discipline."

Church of Scotland rejects union, will remain free of bishops

By Cedric Pulford

London (ENI) — The Church of Scotland has overwhelmingly rejected a plan to form a "super-church" with three other Protestant denominations.

The decision at the church's general assembly on May 19 echoed opposition among congregations to the Scottish Church Initiative for Union (SCIFU), which would have broken with 400 years of Presbyterian tradition by creating the office of bishop in the united church.

Some church members had also voiced concerns that the distinctive Presbyterian office of elder would be put at risk, while others feared that a united church based on "maxi-parishes" formed from the denominations taking part would introduce too much bureaucracy.

The other partners in the union initiative were the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church, but the Church of Scotland is numerically dominant with 40 per cent of all Scottish churchgoers, according to Christian Research, a UK compiler of church statistics.

The church's general assembly rejected the church union proposals by 384 votes to 99.

"Vote ourselves out of existence"

Erik Cramb, convener of the denomination's ecumenical relations committee, told ENI: "SCIFU is dead as far as the Church of Scotland is concerned. There will be no continuing burden of arguments."

He admitted he had not foreseen the scale of the defeat and had thought the outcome would be "too close to call".

During the debate, Paraic Reamonn, a minister, said church members were being asked to "vote ourselves out of existence".

Gordon Savage, another delegate, said: "We are surely all one in Christ Jesus and we don't need to negotiate complicated joinery of denominations to make that apparent."

The church union initiative began in 1994, and opposition to the office of bishop became clear as soon as it was proposed. Cramb explained that the idea was for a new sort of bishop, chosen for six years and then reverting to another job.

He said: "It was not the old, monarchical bishop – more an extended moderator [elected for one year to head the Church of Scotland]. I'm disappointed that I failed to persuade the assembly."

Michael Henley, Anglican bishop of St Andrews and chair of the unity initiative, regretted that the general assembly "did not have the courage to support the SCIFU proposals".

He added: "I am still very interested in pursuing the SCIFU initiatives with the Methodists and the URC. This idea is not going to go away."

Indonesian Christians protest new education policy

(Compass) — Around 15,000 Protestants and Catholics marched through the streets of Jakarta on June 5 in protest of a new education bill endorsed by the government. Under the proposed law, a Christian school with 10 or more Muslim students must provide Islamic worship facilities and two hours of Islamic instruction per week for these students. The same rule will apply to Muslim and Hindu schools with 10 or more students from other religions.

"The Christian and Catholic schools have had a long discussion on what to do if the bill becomes law," said a key member of the Christian community, who asked not to be named. "One thing is for sure, they will not follow things they cannot tolerate."

Nearly 3,000 Muslims joined the demonstration against the bill. However, thousands of members of the Islamic Solidarity Forum held a rally in Yogyakarta in May to show their support for it. All political parties, except the Democratic Party of Struggle headed by President Megawati Sukarnoputri, stand behind the new bill.

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Church

Lutherans agree to regular theological conversations to patch rift

CHICAGO (ELCA) — Leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) met as the Committee on Lutheran Cooperation (CLC) and agreed to take the first steps toward regular theological conversations between the two largest Lutheran churches in the United States.

Entered into "full communion"

The 5.1-million member ELCA and the 2.6-million member Missouri Synod account for all but about 840,000 Lutherans in the United States. The ELCA is the product of several 20th century Lutheran church mergers, the latest in 1988; the St. Louis-based Missouri Synod was established in 1847.

The ELCA entered into "full communion" with the Episcopal Church, Moravian Church in America, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Reformed Church in America and United Church of Christ. The LCMS convention in 2001 adopted a resolution that, because of those agreements, "we cannot consider them [the ELCA] to be an orthodox Lutheran church body."

"...the fact that Lutherans are the largest non-profit provider of social ministries in the United States says something about how we live out our faith..."

The LCMS resolution continued by asking its leadership to evaluate "current cooperative pastoral working arrangements with the ELCA" and to report "results and recommendations" to its next convention in 2004.

In conjunction with the next two CLC meetings, a teaching theologian and a parish pastor from each church will meet with four committee members from each church.

The first meeting will involve a presentation on the theological rationale of the LCMS resolution, as well as the resolution's standing as policy in the Missouri Synod and its implications for the church's relationship with the ELCA. ELCA representatives will have time to respond.

"Nurturing relationships"

ELCA representatives will then present the theological rationale for their church's full-communion agreements, as well as the agreements' standing as policy in the ELCA and their implications for the church's relationship with the Missouri Synod. LCMS representatives will have time to respond.

Representatives from each church will bring to the second meeting, April 15, 2004, in St. Louis, a proposal for "nurturing relationships" with the other church. Together they will draft and approve a joint proposal for "examining relationships between our two church bodies based on a mutual understanding of our respective doctrinal positions."

Issues in the way

"It was encouraging that we came to some agreement that we need to tend to this relationship in a more intentional way," said Hanson. "Getting into more of what that might look like is going to take some thoughtful conversation about what are the issues that tend to stand in the way of a deeper relationship," he said.

Hanson expressed a concern "that the lack of altar and pulpit fellowship not jeopardize the external cooperation we still have — Lutheran Services in America, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, Lutheran World Relief, Lutheran Disaster Response and Lutheran military chaplains."

"Frankly, most people in the world don't pay attention to whether social ministry is being provided by the Missouri Synod or ELCA, but the fact that Lutherans are the largest non-profit provider of social ministries in the United States says something about how we live out our faith as Lutherans in acts of service," Hanson said. "I don't think our internal differences should diminish that cooperative public witness and that public service we provide in this culture."

Jesus Christ is end of all, and the centre to which all tends. Whoever knows him knows the reason of everything. ...
Blaise Pascal

The "Bells" of the Horses Holy (II)

Chapter & Verse

Al Wolters

"On that day HOLY TO THE LORD will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in the Lord's house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar." (Zech 14:20, NIV)

In my last column I talked about a Christmas chapel talk on this verse which I heard 40 years ago at Calvin College by its president, Dr. William Spoelhof. To my great delight I recently received a very gracious letter from Dr. Spoelhof, whose attention had been drawn to my column, oddly enough, by a stranger who had accosted him at a restaurant in Grand Rapids. He told me that he remembered the chapel talk in question, and that he had emphasized the *contrast* between these biblical bells and the "Jingle Bells" of the popular Christmas carol. It appears that, at 93 years old, his legendary memory is as good as ever, and that I (relying on my own less reliable recollection) had not been entirely accurate in my rendering of his meditation from four decades ago.

Iranian bronze bridle bit

The Legend of Constantine's Horse

Of course forty years is not very long in the history of interpretation of the Bible, and there are many other anecdotes that could be told about this verse from the more than two millennia that the Bible has been interpreted and commented on. One such anecdote has to do with a legend that was widely believed in the time of the Church Fathers. At that time the Christian church relied very heavily on the ancient Greek translation of the Bible, the so-called Septuagint, which does not speak of "bells" in our verse, but of a "bit" (Greek *chalinos*), the metal rod which is put in a horse's mouth by which it can be directed by a rider.

The legend that made the rounds in Christian circles in the fourth and fifth century was that this verse from Zechariah referred to the bit in the mouth of the horse belonging to the Roman emperor Constantine, the emperor who had been converted to Christianity in the early fourth century, and who had been responsible for the official acceptance, after centuries of persecution, of Christianity in the Roman empire. According to the legend, the reason why this bit was considered *Holy to the Lord* was that this imperial bit had been fashioned from one of the nails used in the crucifixion of Christ!

The Legend and the Vulgate

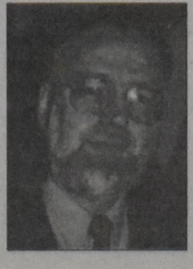
This fantastic story was destined to leave its mark in biblical interpretations for many centuries thereafter. When St. Jerome came to our verse (St. Jerome was the Christian scholar who learned Hebrew and translated the Old Testament into Latin from the original Hebrew, rather than from the Greek of the Septuagint), he was aware that many pious Christians of his day believed the legend about Constantine's horse, a legend which depended on the translation "bit" in our verse. Consequently, even though he himself preferred another translation of the difficult Hebrew word in question (he preferred the rendering "depth," which he understood in a mystical way) he decided to stick with the translation with which his readers were familiar, and used the Latin word for "bit," namely *frenum*.

So it came about that the Latin translation of the Bible which he produced retained the reference to a horse's bit – all because of the influence of a pious legend. Furthermore, since this Latin translation was the so-called Vulgate, which was the commonly accepted Bible in the Latin West throughout the Middle Ages, and which was later officially designated as the "authentic" Bible version by the Roman Catholic Church, this mistaken rendering was accepted in a large segment of Christendom for more than a thousand years.

Calvin's Contribution

Another anecdote has to do with the commentary on Zechariah written by John Calvin in the sixteenth century. Although he had his own eccentric view of what the mysterious Hebrew word *metsulot* meant (he thought it referred to a horses's *stable* – an unhappy guess which no one has followed), he was the first to see that the Hebrew original meant, not that the metsulot were themselves *Holy to the Lord*, but rather that *Holy to the Lord* was written on them, just as it was written on the headpiece of the High Priest according to the description in Exodus 28:36-38. This exegetical insight has carried the day among biblical exegetes, and is reflected in virtually all contemporary versions of the Bible.

Through all these vicissitudes of biblical interpretation, however, there is one point that has never been obscured: the most ordinary things of our ordinary lives should be dedicated to the Lord's service. There should be no dispute about that.



Al Wolters teaches Bible and Greek at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario. He pays a lot of attention to the history of interpretation in the commentary on Zechariah that he is attempting to write.

History

Beginnings of the first Dutch settlement in Alberta

Donald Sinnema

This year 2003 marks the centennial of the Dutch settlement at Granum-Monarch-Nobleford in southern Alberta. Early in 1903 the first Dutch settler and his family arrived from the United States to take up a homestead east of Leavings (later called Granum). Later, other Dutch immigrants arrived from the United States and directly from the Netherlands, and a kolonie soon developed.

This was the first Dutch settlement in Alberta and the second in all of Canada.

In the early 1890s a number of Dutch families immigrated to Winnipeg. A few of them tried to take up homesteading at Yorkton, Saskatchewan (then called Assiniboia), but that effort failed and most of them returned to Winnipeg.

PHOTO COURTESY TYMEN HOFMAN "THE STRENGHT OF THEIR YEARS"

Emmalkamp family (about 1910 - 1915)

The Dutch kolonie in southern Alberta originated as part of the great land rush to claim free homesteads on the Canadian prairies. White settlement in southern Alberta really began after the North-West Mounted Police arrived in 1874 to set up a post at Fort Macleod in order to maintain law and order, and after the Blackfoot Indians relinquished control of much of the region in 1877.

Then followed an era of big ranches with cattle ranging across the open prairies.

But by the turn of the century railways were being laid and this opened up the opportunity for homesteading. In the fertile district northwest of Lethbridge, the land rush occurred in the years 1902-1905.

The First Dutch Settler

The first Dutch settler to arrive in the Leavings district was Harm Emmelkamp and his family, in January or February of 1903. The Emmelkamps were not part of any immigrating group; they were an independent-minded family that for its own reasons sought the opportunity to homestead in Alberta after some trying years and experiences in the United States.

Harm was born October 20, 1867 at Jukwerd, a small village in the northeastern clay-belt region of the Dutch province of Groningen. He grew up on the Jukwerd farm, where his father was a farm laborer. His mother passed away just before his fourth birthday and his father died when he was twelve. So at that age he began working as a farm hand on various farms in the general area.

First to Michigan

To avoid the military draft twenty year old Harm immigrated to the United States, arriving on the Edam at New York on June 4, 1888. His destination was Holland, Michigan, but he soon worked as a laborer in Grand Rapids. There he met Jantje Roos, who had immigrated as a single woman from Garsthuizen in Groningen to Grand Rapids a year earlier. They were married there on March 15, 1890. In the first decade of their marriage Harm owned a 30 acre mixed farm near Grandville and then a small truck farm in the Blendon township west of Grand Rapids. For extra income he worked in a stone quarry. In these years three children were born; one died.

Though Harm had grown up in the Hervormde Kerk in the Netherlands, in Michigan he and Jantje joined the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) as baptized members. They were married by the pastor of the Fifth Ave. CRC of Grand Rapids, then joined the Grandville Ave. congregation, and then in 1892 the Jenison CRC.

Then followed an era of big ranches with cattle ranging across the open prairies.

In 1897, however, Harm and his wife resigned from this church. They offered no reasons, but from church records it appears that they and others were not happy about the way the Jenison consistory handled the case of an elder of this church who was accused of stealing hay. He was hauling hay for another church member and was caught throwing down extra bundles to feed his own horses. Attempts by the consistory to get the Emmelkamps to return to the church failed, and in December of 1898 their membership was formally lapsed. This experience left its mark on Harm; he never again joined a church.

Then to New Mexico

In 1900 Jantje developed lung problems and doctors advised the family to go west to a drier climate. So in the latter part of the year they moved to northern New Mexico and settled at Raton just north of the small Dutch community of Maxwell City, where Bethesda Sanitarium drew Dutch folk suffering from tuberculosis. The Emmelkamps did not join the local Maxwell City CRC.

Harm bought a dry land farm of about 80 acres at Raton, but due to the arid climate and poor crops he could not make a living from the land and work was impossible to find. This left the family in heavy debt. On the night of December 10, 1902, they abandoned the farm and quietly left with their debts unpaid.

PHOTO COURTESY T. HOFMAN

Working in the oat field

The farm was claimed by the local storekeeper and other creditors, who immediately published a notice in *De Grondwet* (a widely read newspaper from Holland, Michigan) that Emmelkamp had secretly left with his debts unpaid; it ended: "Let everyone beware."

The family's destination was the Dearborn Valley, where a new government irrigation project was opening up farm land southwest of Great Falls, Montana. Nothing is known of their stay in the Dearborn Valley, but it was brief.

The Move to Alberta

It was probably there that Harm heard about better opportunities in Alberta. A free homestead was appealing, and the dry climate would be healthy for Jantje. So in January or February 1903 the Emmelkamp family moved on to southern Alberta to make a new start. Family accounts differ on whether they arrived in January or February.

A part of the family tradition suggests that Harm came to check out Alberta already in October 1902, but this seems unlikely. Had he done so, he would surely have filed on a homestead at that time and the family would not have headed for the Dearborn Valley in December.

Harm went ahead, perhaps by a few days, and landed at Macleod; Jantje and their young children Sienie, Jan, and Harm soon arrived by train. There at Macleod Harm had made arrangements for the family to stay in a log cabin with a sod roof and dirt floor for about a month.

Harm was able to find some work with Thomas McLean, who had a ranch on Willow Creek near the junction with the Oldman River. The family then stayed in a log cabin nearby in the Oldman River bottom about six miles northeast of Macleod. They ended up staying there for two years.

Their fourth child Diena was born in this cabin on Christmas day of 1903 – the first Dutch child born in the settlement.

Homesteading

Meanwhile Harm sought a homestead. On April 21, 1903, he filed on an available quarter, which lay five miles north of the cabin and eight miles east of Leavings. This new village, which had its beginnings in 1902, lay north of Macleod on the CPR railway line to Calgary. Hans Ellison, the first merchant at Leavings, was just finishing construction of a general store and was about to open it in May. Homesteads along the track at Leavings were already taken, and open homesteads lay to the east.

While working occasionally for McLean, Harm was able to break

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PHOTO TAKEN FROM "A FURROW LAID BARE"

Homestead c. 1913

History

Living history – by telling her story

GETTING UNSTUCK

Arlene Van Hove

"Hillary is telling the truth when she writes she believed Bill when he first told her about his innocence in regard to his relationship with Monica Lewinsky," says Colleen as she settles for her counselling session. "I watched her being interviewed on television a few days after the story broke, adamantly defending her husband and laying the responsibility of this "scandal" at the feet of their political opponents," she continues.

"How do you know?" I ask.

She grimaces painfully and becomes silent.

Political strategy?

Anne Kingston of the *National Post* recently pulled no punches as she accused Hillary Rodham Clinton of playing "the wronged wife" card to the max and using it to forward her political ambition, which may include running for president in 2008. Using satire at its best, Kingston ruthlessly tries to demolish any empathy readers may have for Hillary's "darkest hour." Kingston also makes no bones about the public not caring one whit about Hillary's political agenda or political experience and insists they are only interested in witnessing her pain and shame. Then she blasts Hillary for playing the wronged wife "gender role" and laments the possibility of equality between the sexes in the political arena if this strategy continues to be used.

Hanging herself out to dry

In the last few weeks various columnists have written either 'for' or 'against' Hillary's decision to 'tell all' regarding her years in the White House for the sum of eight million dollars. This is not surprising and easy to do because most of us have knee jerk reactions to something like this if only in regards to money she was paid.

Still, Hillary has chosen to become extremely vulnerable in her book as she writes about her life. She continues in this mode as she details her reaction to her husband's admission of lying to her, Chelsea, his staff and the country about the reality of his marital infidelity. She acknowledges being devastated, shocked, and deeply hurt. Hillary also admits to being sad and disappointed as well as furious and raging at her husband all at the same time. She tells about having to go deep inside herself and her faith to discover any remaining belief in their marriage and to find some path to understanding. It took her a long, long time, she says, to decide whether she would stay in the marriage.

Learning through history?

There is no doubt Hillary is "living" the story our children and grandchildren will one day read about in history books. The texts for the classroom will be somewhat different from the personal story Hillary is allowing us to see. Yet, we may want to remind ourselves we study history to learn about our own as well as other people's culture and civilization in a way that allows us to understand ourselves. In simple terms, history is about learning where we have come from, what happened and (hopefully) why, as well as what mistakes were made and how in the future we may need to do things differently so that we can all live together in health and harmony.

Columnist Bill O'Reilly recently reminded us that a most profound change has occurred in American society in terms of how bad behavior is processed and condoned. Remember G. Gordon Liddy? He now has a syndicated radio show. Oliver North works for Fox News. Winona Ryder is doing commercials fresh off her shoplifting conviction. Robert Downey Jr. is just out of drug rehab and acting on *Ally McBeal*. And Monica Lewinsky has been hired to host a prime-time television program called *Mr. Personality*. Then, there are the rappers who seem to get bigger contracts the more often they are busted by the police. The list could go on and on.

The message is that American society doesn't seem to care how anyone behaves.

Unashamed sorrow and need of prayer

In the midst of all this, we have Hillary telling a painful personal story and condoning none of it. Staunchly admitting her need for faith and prayer during those long dark months. Unashamed of the sorrow it caused her and the difficult road back to reconciliation.

"I appreciate Hillary sharing her experience," Colleen says after a long silence. "I know she is telling the truth about being fooled because so many of us are," she continues. "But I am especially glad she is letting people know this *is* and *will continue* to be very, very *wrong*."

Arlene Van Hove is a psychotherapist with Cascade Christian Counselling Association in Surrey, B.C.

Dutch settlement

...continued from p.10

fifteen acres on his homestead that first year, though none was cropped. The next year he broke another twenty acres and seeded fifteen acres. By then he had six horses and four cows, and had worked on fencing the homestead.

In February 1904 he built a two-room framed shack, 12 x 24 feet in size, which cost $150. But it was not till February of the next year that the family left the cabin in the river bottom and took up residence there. By the time Harm proved up on his homestead and received patent on it in May 1907, he had also built a granary, cattle shed, and chicken house, dug three wells, put up 2¼ miles of fencing, and had broken 100 acres, 85 of which were in crop the previous year. Because Emmelkamp had become somewhat acculturated while living for almost fifteen years in the United States – he had learned English and had gained valuable farming experience, also on dry land – he was very helpful to the new and inexperienced Dutch homesteaders who arrived later.

PHOTO COURTESY TYMEN HOFMAN "THE STRENGHT OF THEIR YEARS"

Typical farm house

PHOTO COURTESY T. HOFMAN "THE STRENGHT OF THEIR YEARS"

Saturday polishing

Later Dutch Settlers

In the summer of 1903 four other Hollanders visited Alberta from Montana, and in August and September they claimed homesteads near Emmelkamp east of Leavings. They came to settle only the following year.

Then in early April of 1904 a larger group of forty-one immigrants, six families and two single men, arrived directly from the Netherlands. Most were from Nijverdal in the province of Overijssel. Since homesteads around Leavings were already taken up, this group claimed homesteads ten miles farther east; they soon called their district "Nieuw Nijverdal."

When two new railway lines were laid through this district, the new towns of Monarch sprouted up in 1908 and Noble (later Nobleford) in 1909.

By then many more Dutch immigrants had joined the settlement.

Already in 1905 some of the Dutch families from the east and west sides of the settlement organized the Nijverdal Christian Reformed Church, the first in Canada. Due to distance, this congregation split into the Granum CRC and Monarch CRC in 1911.

Though Emmelkamp's family soon joined the Granum church, Harm never did. However, he did attend services as a "friend" of the congregation.

On the east side, a Reformed Church was established at Monarch in 1909. It is the oldest Reformed Church still in existence in Canada.

After four tough years of lonely pioneer life in homestead shacks on the bald prairie, this Dutch community began to flourish. Within a rapid decade it became a well developed rural community, with new homes and barns, new railways and towns, new churches and country schools, and even rural telephone service.

Donald Sinnema teaches theology at Trinity Christian College and expects to publish a book of letters written by the Dutch pioneers of this Alberta settlement in the period 1903-1914.

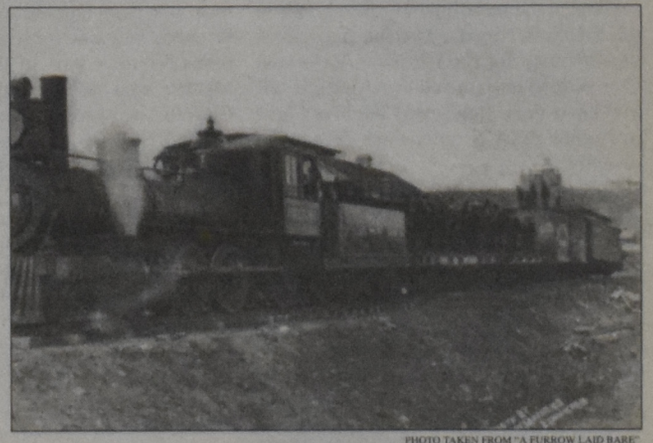


PHOTO TAKEN FROM "A FURROW LAID BARE"

Trains played an important part in the life of a community.

Synod

Christian Reformed Synod 2003 meets in Sioux Center, Iowa

This June, over 200 delegates from Christian Reformed churches in every corner of the United States and Canada came to Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa for Synod 2003. The first session was held on the morning of Saturday, June 14. At that session, newly elected president Wayne Brouwer set the tone for the days to come by urging the delegates and advisors to model the unity that brothers and sisters in Christ should possess.

"We need each other," he said. "Remember that when you look across the table, it's Jesus looking back at you."

The days ahead were ones of both unity and dissonance, as delegates prayed and worshiped together but also engaged in animated and sometimes heated debate to complete the tasks on their agenda.

The discussions of reports on Christian day school education and bioethics provoked the most discussion, but Synod tackled many other issues as well. The delegates briefly discussed an overture to allow the casting of lots in the election of officebearers, then decided that such a practice would be allowed if a congregational vote was part of the process. According to George Vander Weit, a delegate from classis Grand Rapids East, "We need to get the congregation involved somehow."

Later, Synod designated "ministry associate" as the name of the CRC's fourth ecclesiastical office, which had previously been "evangelist." The jobs included under the umbrella of "ministry associate" will include that of evangelist, chaplain, youth pastor, and many others.

In response to an overture from classis British Columbia North-West, Synod appointed a committee to study restorative justice. The committee will explore biblical principles on justice and will suggest ways for the church and its members to apply these principles.

Synod appointed yet another committee to research issues of war and peace. Many delegates stressed the importance of forming such a committee, citing the proliferation of biological and chemical weapons and the threat of terrorism as reasons why the CRC should be discussing war and peace.

In addition to discussing important issues, delegates and advisors heard from a number of organizations affiliated with the CRC. On Monday, the Christian Reformed Home Missions unveiled an ambitious plan to plant 30 churches a year. Later that day, Synod approved 39 graduates of Calvin Seminary as candidates to be ministers of the Word. The fifteen candidates present at Dordt were recognized individually and given a standing ovation, after which Cornelius Plantinga, president of Calvin Seminary, gave the delegates an update on the work of the seminary. Other organizations that gave presentations were the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee and Christian Reformed World Missions.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DORDT COLLEGE

Synod celebrates reconciliation in Nigeria and reestablishes fellowship

On June 17, Synod 2003 worked to advance unity in the church as the delegates celebrated the mending of broken bonds in the church in Nigeria. The delegates voted unanimously for the Christian Reformed Church to enter into full ecclesiastical fellowship with the Reformed Church of Christ in Nigeria (RCCN) after three decades of disunity.

The RCCN was born from a bitter split with the Christian Reformed Church in Nigeria (CRCN). Disagreements between those two churches were made worse by political strife that resulted in a bloody conflict, and for years the Christian Reformed Church's relationship with the CRCN made ecclesiastical fellowship with the RCCN impossible.

Recently, however, the RCCN and the CRCN reconciled their differences in what Peter Vander Meulen of the office of Social Justice and Hunger Action calls "an amazing church document." In that document, the two churches reconcile their differences and ask forgiveness from each other for their part in the split. Vander Meulen, who used to work in Nigeria with CRWRC, worked in concert with the Reformed Ecumenical Council help bring about both political and church reconciliation.

"This is a God-moment," said Rev. Leonard Batterink of Classis B.C. North-West. Afterwards, Synod celebrated the newfound unity between these churches in a time of singing and prayer.

What is the responsibility of the church over toward the school?

Christian education seems like one of those issues that doesn't usually cause a lot of controversy, one of those few things that we can all agree on — it's good, we support it, and that's that. But things are not always as they seem. When a report on Christian day school education reached the floor of Synod, it turned out to be a very controversial issue indeed, as delegates engaged in animated discussion on the issue.

One of the reasons that the discussion was so lively is that Christian education proved to be an intensely personal matter. Many delegates prefaced their remarks by noting that they themselves were products of Christian schools, and that they valued their opportunity to attend such schools. Some, who hadn't attended Christian schools, lamented the judgmental attitude that they encountered in the church community. And still others told of the dark side of Christian education, telling tales of prejudice and exclusion of minorities and children with special needs.

Yet while the delegates brought their personal experiences and perspectives to bear on the discussion, the report, which was commissioned by Synod 2000, declared Christian education to be not a personal issue, but a "communal, church responsibility." The report argued that educating children in Reformed Christian schools is a covenantal responsibility that was to be shared by all church members.

While all of the delegates supported Christian education, many of them had reservations.

"When I read the report, I was struck by an alarmist tone," said William Vis, a delegate from Classis Atlantic Northeast. "The report claims to respect personal liberty, yet it nearly mandates Christian day school education."

He and others feared that the ideas in the report would increase divisions within the church, unfairly judging the parents who chose not to send their children to Christian schools. Other delegates worried that the recommendations of the report would cause the church to become too involved in schools.

"Should the church really finance Christian schools?" asked Ben Vander Lugt, a delegate from Classis Toronto. "That seems to suggest a church run school."

Despite these reservations, however, there were many at Synod who voiced their support for the report. Calvin College president Galen Byker argued against the strict separation of church and school, warning delegates of the possible results of such separation.

"This is not about money," he said. "The strongest connection is theology and missions. In the 21st century, it is not wise to keep a wide gap between church and schools."

Rev. John Witvliet of Classis Iakota urged his fellow delegates to commend the report despite it's flaws. "We may wish it to be slightly different," he said. "When give a sermon, many in the congregation may wish it to be different. But the sermon must be preached, and this sermon, I think, needs to be preached."

In the end, Synod's reservations about the report on Christian day school education were enough to keep the delegates from commending it to churches for study. Synod did, however, accept many of the report's recommendations. Among these recommendations were a reaffirmation of the CRC's commitment to Christian education, a plan to correspond with government officials on the issue of school choice, and a plan to publish educational materials that includes the CRC's position on Christian education.

When does life begin?

In 1972, Synod weighed in on the practice of abortion, soundly condemning "the wanton or arbitrary destruction of any human being at any stage of its development from the point of conception to the point of death." Thirty-one years later, with the appearance of fertility drugs, in-vitro fertilization, genetic screening, and stem cell research, things have gotten much more complicated. Synod 2003 discussed a report on life issues in light of these recent developments.

When does life begin? The question was central in Synod's discussion of conception and abortion. The report itself conceded that "Scripture does not explicitly teach what moral protection the unimplanted human embryo deserves." In spite of this concession, however, the report took a "pro-life" stance that condemned the destruction of human embryos, in or outside of the womb, except to save the life of the mother.

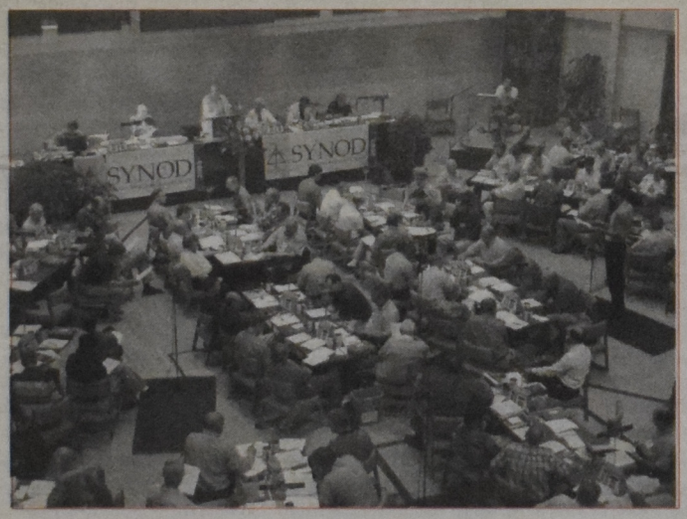
Many delegates claimed that the report had too narrow a definition of life. Sylvan Gerritsma of Classis Niagara said, "Human life, biblically speaking, is not reducible to the biotic aspect, or the joining of sperm and egg."

Others, however, were not as willing to question the report's strong pro-life stance. Mick Vanden Bosch, a delegate from Classic Northcentral Iowa, conceded that life is more than biotic, but said that he "must err on the side of protecting life."

Other delegates objected to the report because they thought it contained language that was too judgmental of those who use certain fertility treatments or endorse abortion under circumstances other than risk to the mother.

"This report lays on our people burdens to heavy to bear," said George Vander Weit from Classis Grand Rapids East. He spoke of Synods in the past that had resolved not to bind the conscience of the members of the church and then had gone on to do just that. "It's deja-vu all over again," he concluded.

After much discussion, Synod approved a number of precepts to serve as a guide for churches dealing with these issues. Synod said that procreation must be kept within a male-female marriage relationship, that couples may seek to correct infertility through morally acceptable means, and that the unimplanted human embryo deserves "significant protection." They were unwilling, however, to spell out the ways in which these precepts must be carried out, choosing instead to focus on compassionate care for the infertile couple and the pregnant mother.



James Schaap charms delegates' wives

While their husbands were busy in meetings, many of the delegates' wives went on a bus tour of some places in Northwest Iowa. A bus tour has long been a Synod tradition, and this year it was hosted by James Schaap, a professor of English at Dordt who is also a published author.

"I've been to Synod three times," said Alice Kooistra. "This tour was completely different than the other, but still wonderful — nice and informative. We had a great view of the state of Iowa."

But under Schaap's leadership, this year's tour was not merely a tour of Northwest Iowa's interesting sites; it was also a survey of the writers of the region, including Frederick Manfred, Sietze Buning, James Heynen, and Schaap himself.

"It was so nice to finally meet Mr. Schaap," said Elly Evans. "I've read some of his stories before, but it was great to hear him read them. It made it so meaningful, and each of the readings had something to do with the place."

Reports on Synod 2003 were provided by Andrew De Young, an English major focusing on writing. He is from Bloomington, Minnesota.

Connecting to the invisible

Intangible Things
Heidi VanDerSlikke

I don't cope very well with crowds, or with a lack of sleep, so it's amazing how much I can enjoy an event such as God Uses Ink. GUI is a conference for Christian writers, held each June in Guelph, Ontario. From Thursday to Saturday, writers from a myriad of genres and media are offered a smorgasbord of continuing classes, plenary sessions and workshops.

This year's keynote speaker, Mark Buchanan, spoke on "Expressing the Invisible." He explored the Christian writer's calling to articulate, in one form or another, the truth and beauty of God. If you haven't already done so, I highly recommend reading both of Buchanan's books: *Your God is Too Safe*, and *Things Unseen*, (Multnomah).

GUI participants come from dozens of denominations, literally from one end of Canada to the other, with a few from the United States as well. Some are still discovering whether or not they really are writers; others are award-winning authors. They come for manifold reasons, but the common denominator is a desire to connect with their craft, their colleagues and their creator.

This year I helped out at the conference book store. From my perch at the Visa/ Mastercard table I watched as people mingled, renewing old acquaintances, discovering new friends, or just perusing books and people. Remarkably, in this environment even an introvert can establish valuable connections with kindred spirits.

A story to tell

On my way to supper one night I followed a trim, white-haired woman to the far end of the packed dining room. We sat side by side, and ate in silence for several minutes while I wondered how to start up a conversation. In a stroke of social brilliance, the old Canadian favorite came to mind.

"So, Anna," I ventured, peaking at her name tag, "Looks like the sun finally decided to shine out there."

She nodded, wiping the corners of her mouth, and agreeing that a little warmth would be welcome.

"We have loads of strawberries in the garden," I babbled. "If the weather turns warm now it could be a bumper crop."

"You like to garden?" she asked in a thick accent.

"Not really, but my father-in-law does. We have rich soil and lots of space on the farm."

"Ah, you live on a farm. My daughter always wanted to live on a farm. But that was not to be."

"Is she a city-dweller?"

"No…she's dead. Two years ago…," she faltered, her eyes brimming with tears. Regaining her composure, Anna produced a photograph of a lovely young woman with two blonde children. She explained that her daughter had been widowed by a car accident. Shortly after burying her husband she learned that she had cancer. A year or so later she died, leaving Anna's two grandchildren without parents.

For the next half hour I listened intently to Anna's fascinating history. Losing her daughter was but one of the tragedies she had endured. Through it all she was convinced that God had a purpose for her. Now, at age 70, Anna was certain that God had given her an important story to tell. She was obviously a woman of considerable intelligence, but it was also clear to me that she would have great difficulty trying to write her story in English. So I asked, "Why have you come to GUI?"

"To find someone to write my story," she stared at me. "Nothing happens by coincidence. Not even you sitting here beside me." It's hard to argue with that level of conviction. Suddenly I thought of another sprightly senior citizen named Hilda.

Hilda is around Anna's age, with sparkling eyes and a smile that conveys her zest for life. Last winter she went downhill skiing in Austria. Prior to that, she published a book of memoirs as an 80th birthday gift for a friend. I knew at once that Hilda was the answer to Anna's need for a writer.

Later that evening I watched as the two snow-haired ladies sat on a sofa together, chatting as if they were long-lost girlfriends. Before Anna left the conference she tracked me down to give me a hug.

Back at home I looked forward to sleeping in a little on Sunday morning. But the robin's song woke me just before daybreak. I stared out the bedroom window. The moon hung like a giant silver disk pasted onto a flannel-grey sky. One by one the birds came to life, joining the chorus to welcome the dawn. The smell of irises drifted upward from the flower bed and I thought of all the people I had met over the weekend. I pondered some of the words of wisdom I had heard. I remembered Anna's face as she thanked me for my help.

"To me, you are like an angel from God," she said. "He will bless you for this. Just wait and see." I smiled as the thought crossed my mind.

He already has, Anna. He already has.

Heidi VanderSlikke lives in Harriston, Ontario

Why go to church? 23

One question, many answers

A. A. Van Ruler

My reflections on the question, "Why go to church?" have come to an end. Here I look back, not to provide another summary, but to ask, What have we done?

Are we indeed finished with our topic? Aren't there more answers to our question?

That's hard to know with any certainty. The human heart and mind are limited in comprehension. Reality will never become wholly transparent to our insight; it will always exceed our grasp. It is entirely possible that I have overlooked a number of things. But I'm sure that we have considered the most obvious and most important ones. Twenty-one answers strikes me as a respectable number in any case.

But what have we done? First of all, we have repeatedly posed a question, a concrete and practical question. We asked about going to church, regularly, as a habit. In our reflections, we did go far afield at times, but they kept circling around that one practical question.

It is impossible, however, to deal with such a concrete matter in a purely concrete manner. To do so would be to miss the boat, for to think through a concrete matter to its very bottom, we must touch on various abstract issues. Still, in talking about these abstractions we are also talking at the same time about those concrete matters. The slogan, "Down with theory; think practically!" is a dead end. It would lead to the destruction of our entire culture. To think only practically is not real thinking.

Question?

Looking back, however, we must remind ourselves that the question, "Why go to church?" has a different meaning for one person than for another.

To the person who doesn't go to church, it carries the connotation, "Why should I?" Unless he is a thoughtless person who doesn't care much about anything, he will have some ready responses. Let me list a few off the top of my head.

What good does it do me to go to church? Does it make me a better person? Does it make me any wiser? Does it benefit me in any way? Isn't it a lot of nonsense? Isn't all that comes out of the church a lot of sentimental cant? At least, it doesn't mean anything to me. None of it really speaks to me where I live. It hardly seems worth the trouble. To be honest, the whole business strikes me as boring and stupefying. All through history the church has been nothing more than a bulwark of conservatism and reaction. It has resisted all social and scientific advances. The church keeps people ignorant. Does anyone really believe all those myths and fairytales dished up by the church? Let me tell you about how the church treated me many years ago.... All those pious people sitting in church are nothing but hypocrites and party-poopers.

Salisbury Cathedral, England

PHOTO TAKEN FROM "THE CATHEDRALS OF ENGLAND"

That's a handful in no particular order. If we put our mind to it, we could come up with many more. All of them with a negative slant. In this way, the question can be asked with a shrug and dismissed.

To the faithful church-goer, however, the question has a different connotation and meaning. It may take on a reflective sense: I've been going to church regularly all this time – Why am I doing it? What does it really mean to me? Why am I so dependent on it? Or it may take a somewhat different tone: I do go to church regularly, but just what is it that goes on there? What are the various facets of the worship service? What is it that happens to me there?

Incredible

Obviously, I wrote the preceding 21 reflections as a churchgoer. So I did not discuss arguments that may be put forward against going to church. That could prove interesting. I've already suggested a few possible arguments in support of not going to church. They contain a good measure of truth. Still, on closer examination, don't they sound like rationalizations? Aren't the arguments of non-churchgoers just as superficial as some of the blather that comes from the pulpit?

Let me respond with two observations. First, it is possible that all those arguments are expressions of a rebellion against God adopted as a deliberate stance in life. We must grant this position our deep respect. This is a completely honest, human reality. I prefer people to frankly give this as their reason for not going to church. Then it isn't just blather. At least then we know where we stand. People can and do reject God, and we must permit them that freedom. That freedom merits our deepest respect.

Secondly, one may also say, I am religious, I believe in God and want to worship him, but I can't tolerate the Jewish and apostolic character of Christian worship. I'd rather worship God without that.

This, too, is a boldly human stance. It is true that the fact that salvation comes to us through the Jews and through one person – Jesus Christ – puts an incredible strain on credibility. This is difficult for someone of sound mind to tolerate. In this sense, there is an anti-Semitic streak in all of us.

These two arguments, from hatred of God and from hatred of Israel's Messiah, are wholly valid arguments against going to church. Other arguments are only secondary, and many are worthless.

Nevertheless, nowadays many people are swayed by such arguments and they no longer go to church. They don't go anywhere else either and the liturgical side of their nature is withering. Western culture is going flat. The flower of life-as-liturgy or life-as-worship is dying and we are left with dead petals. Can humanism or Marxism or Islam or Buddhism restore that flower? Few worry their heads over such questions.

Dead petals

I did not write the foregoing series as a preacher but as a churchgoer, so I haven't been guilty of pleading for my own job. I have not been able to preach for the last six years for medical reasons, so I have been going to church as a member of the congregation. In these articles I have sought to reflect on my own experience as a churchgoer, to make myself more aware of what happens there. What do I experience? Every time again I am turned on by something different, as if by a magic wand. And I am deeply moved.

The 21 reflections were the deposit of those experiences and emotions. But I didn't write just to enhance my own awareness. I wrote to help my fellow churchgoers to reflect on their own experience and non-churchgoers to reconsider their decision. To see church attendance slipping is very disheartening. A poorly attended worship service is as discouraging as an empty stadium at a ball game. It is hard on the office-bearers, both spiritually and financially. And it is unpleasant for the people who are there. But it is hardest on those who are not there. They are the dead petals of the dying flower of our culture. If we are truly participants in our world, all we can do is cry out: "If you want to live, for the sake of your temporal and eternal well-being, for God's sake, go to church. In heaven's name do not allow the liturgical heart of your human nature to die."

Answer?

Looking back over what we have done, I've looked first at the question and then at the writer. Now I want to glance once more at the answers we've considered.

There was only one question. It remained the same and it was specific and concrete: "Why go to church?" But we came up with no less than 21 answers. Isn't that suspicious?

As soon as we reply with more than one argument for a certain position, especially if they aren't connected but loosely threaded together like pearls on a string, this arouses a certain wariness from a logical point of view. It means that one argument is not adequate, not entirely convincing. Otherwise, we wouldn't need to come with more. But do a number of not-entirely-adequate arguments together bring certainty?

Does our series of articles arouse a similar suspicion? Did we provide 21 different arguments? Or were they only 21 answers? And is there a difference between arguments and answers?

It depends on the nature of that single question. Was the question really only a question, or did it – posed from the perspective of the churchgoer – really present a proposition? We did not put it in the form of a proposition, certainly not in the form of a scientific proposition. The latter demands proof. It is true that it did contain a hidden proposition, namely, that going to church regularly belongs to the very nature of being a complete human being.

But when we talk about human beings, we cannot do so exclusively in the language of science. We cannot proceed by way of proposition-and-proof. The way of question-and-answer is more appropriate.

Something similar is true of churchgoing. We can assert that it

belongs to the completeness of our being, but being human is in part a matter of freedom and choice. These elements are also present in every assertion about the nature of human being. So too, going to church is a matter of choice, whether that be impulsive, intuitive, traditional or conscious choice.

In making such a choice, we can only ask, "Why should I?" And that question can only be answered approximately. We can never entirely reduce the matter of choice to reason, for at bottom it is a matter of will. We must take the leap. And reason cannot leap. Reason can only walk, step by step. It can take us a long way, but it cannot take us to the heart of the matter. We can only approach it.

Therefore, no proofs; just answers – many answers. And each of them are to some extent incomplete. Taken together they do not deliver compelling proof for a proposition. But is that so bad? Does someone holding a diamond need to know the chemical composition of the diamond as he turns it in the light to admire its sparkling facets? That's what we did: we held up the diamond of the church and worship to let the light fall on different facets.

That can be fascinating, and it can draw us to church to participate in this activity, but it does not provide a proof for its necessity.

But would that be good? Wouldn't that take away the freedom of going to church? Then we would be obliged to go, perhaps not forced by our parents but by the law of reason. Which compulsion is greater is hard to say. Those who allow reason to rule their lives mutilate their nature to its very core. Then human existence is reduced to science and stops being existence.

But there may be another reason for the multiplicity of answers. Wasn't there a lot of repetition and overlap in our answers? That was pretty well unavoidable. Although each time we gave a new answer, they all dealt with the same thing. They cannot be reduced to one another, nor was one deduced from the other, but they were all intimately related. They were interconnected, so sometimes we repeated what had already been said elsewhere.

Because they overlapped, this meant that when the same theme appeared again, it did so in a new light and received new content. At least that was my intention.

Salisbury interior PHOTO TAKEN FROM "THE CATHEDRALS OF ENGLAND"

Rooted in experience

There is one more matter that I want to talk about. Almost everything that I've discussed came out of the experience I've had as a member of the Janskerk in Utrecht, a university church, where I learned a great deal. My reflections have, therefore, not been purely theoretical speculations about an ideal worship service. They are rooted in what I experienced Sunday after Sunday in that church. Those church services were not perfect; there were shortcomings.

In the services of that church, the element of providing a chance to be converted played a minor role. Often the full Reformed doctrine of predestination was openly denied. It is true that this is a great mystery that is not easy to handle. Secondly, very little effort was put into revealing the sinner to himself. We prefer to be more up-to-date and speak about the meaning of life rather than about guilt. And, thirdly, I missed the full joy at the redemption accomplished for us in Christ. We tend to shy away from big claims, for the church must not be too triumphalistic. That's a sickness that often troubles the evangelical churches, so we tended to emphasize Christ's death and the church's powerlessness.

I don't want to downplay those shortcomings that I experienced; nevertheless, there are a great many other registrations in the gospel organ and in the church's liturgy. The richness of these many settings wash over us every week if we go to church regularly.

Theory in the flesh

I did learn a great deal from worshiping in the Janskerk. To my own shame, I must admit that it was here that I first really discovered the liturgy of the church, not theoretically but in actuality, in flesh and blood. That was for me a tremendous discovery. Not that I became hung up on it. The liturgy is sober but it gives us style. And above all, it has its own role to play; it has its own unique function. When we discover this, we can open ourselves to a renewal of a catholic liturgical sense, without thereby losing the precious heritage of the Reformation. We can leave behind us some of the narrowness of the Protestantism of the last centuries.

Protestants are used to going to church for the sermon and considering the rest as a by-product. For a long time it hung on the sermon like so many rags and tatters. After the sermon was done, we were eager to leave, to go back into the world.

Theology after Barth and Bonhoeffer also had something to do with this one-sided emphasis on the sermon and the neglect of liturgy. If the church strives to be purely prophetic, it may tend to become purely diaconal, service-oriented as well, and from the diaconal to the purely social and political is but a small step.

It may be true, as Noordmans says, that the real liturgy takes place in the street, that is, in the world, but it is not enough to say so. All of life is indeed worship, but this idea vanishes like a cloud if it isn't given substance in the specific and self-conscious liturgy of the church.

To experience the rhythm of that liturgy is to be psychologically and spiritually revived, to have your lungs filled with fresh air. But I didn't want to focus on that personal experience, but on the theological implications. My discovery of the liturgy gave me an entirely new perspective on the church, but also on all other theological issues.

If there is not just the preaching of the gospel and the proclamation of the Word, but if there is also uniquely and centrally the liturgy, and if we are expected to experience that existentially, then everything else suddenly looks quite different.

It has deep implications for theology, although it does not mean a revolution in theological reflection. You don't have to leave the Reformed neighborhood (tradition), for example, and move to a Catholic neighborhood. But it does enrich our outlook tremendously. We might argue that it is a conscious return to the original intentions of the Reformation, for the one-sided emphasis on the sermon is decidedly not reformational. It is a dilution of our understanding of the church that came in later ages.

Seeing is creating

Were the worship services I experienced in my church exceptional? By no means. That is simply the place I experienced them. Were they really that edifying, that inspirational? Or was I just seeing in them what I wanted to see there? Were all the other members just as enthusiastic about the liturgies as I was?

An important life truth is that what we see in things is in them. We must "see" them in such a way that our seeing puts it in them. Seeing is also creative. We must not be gripped by things; we must also grip them. We must not let them dominate our spirits but we must give them spirit. Only then will they sustain our spirits.

It is also true that we must see what is actually in things as they are. The scales must fall from our eyes. Our seeing doesn't only do something to things, but the things must affect the way we see. All of reality can suddenly look like a dumbfounding miracle. Similarly, the reality of the church, whether in a sudden flash or after years of faithful training, can reveal itself to us in all its glorious beauty. That's what happened to me in the Janskerk, and that's what I wished to communicate in these 21 answers.

Neerlandia church c.1929

Structure activities for a balanced family life

Don't be afraid to say "Enough!"

by Lisa M. Petsche

The pace of my family's daily life has increased dramatically with the onset of soccer season. Given that our three children are all on different teams with a Monday-to-Thursday schedule, it's a challenge for my husband and me to get everyone to practices and games on time, especially since locations vary and we have only one vehicle. Some days our schedule is so tight that it doesn't allow for the unexpected, like a meeting that runs late or a traffic snarl.

Thankfully, and intentionally, the rest of the year is much saner, our kids each attending one weeknight activity and one Saturday activity. (During the summer they take a break from the latter so our weekends are free.) We discontinued swimming lessons a while back, when scheduling got complicated.

Hectic lifestyles are the norm now for families like ours. It's common to juggle organized sports schedules, music and other lessons – such as figure skating, dance or karate – and club involvements on an ongoing basis. Often each parent is heading out in a different direction with one of the kids (and others in tow if they have more than two).

"Our home and family lives mirror the frenzied 'productivity' that fills our workplaces...many (children) are now chained to schedules that used to be reserved for CEOs," observes public television producer and author John de Graaf in the Spring 2003 issue of Enough!, the newsletter of the Center for a New American Dream.

At the root of this over-scheduling phenomenon is our competitive, achievement-oriented culture, which exerts considerable pressure on today's parents to produce well-rounded children who are accomplished in academics, sports, the arts and social skills. Raising good kids is no longer enough; we're also expected to give them an edge over peers.

Unfortunately, though, when kids are heavily scheduled, their creativity, academic performance, physical health and/or mental health is likely to suffer (overstressed parents also experience health repercussions). Quality time with family and friends gets sacrificed, as does couple time for parents. Personal "down time" may be non-existent for family members. In some cases it's also hard to fit in regular worship services. Volunteering in one's faith community or elsewhere is often out of the question. These are indicators that our priorities need adjusting.

The following guidelines can help restore balance to family life:

❖ Determine each child's activity preferences. Don't assume they'll follow in siblings' footsteps or have the same interests you did.

❖ Limit the number of activities per child. If your kids are involved in more than two, cut back. If they have many interests, insist they pursue them serially – for example, dance lessons this season, gymnastics the next.

❖ When contemplating a new activity for your child, consider the impact it would have on the rest of the family.

❖ Don't overlook the value of hobbies that older children can engage in at home, at their own pace.

❖ Build in unstructured time each week.

❖ Periodically evaluate your family's schedule and its impact on everyone.

❖ Be honest about whose needs you're serving: your children's or your own?

❖ Work at being a good role model of healthy, balanced living.

And here are some practical strategies for time-challenged parents:

❖ Keep a large, master calendar of lessons, recitals, practices, games and appointments in a prominent spot. Be clear with your spouse on who's chauffeuring whom where, and when. Organization and communication are key.

❖ Collect quick and easy recipes and ensure you have the necessary ingredients on hand, or prepare double batches of meals and freeze half. Don't skip meals or rely on fast food.

❖ Turn chauffeuring time into meaningful time, by talking with your kids instead of turning on the radio or allowing personal stereos.

❖ Try a sabbatical from all scheduled activities for one season. Use some of your reclaimed time doing things together. Note the impact on each member, and your family as a whole. Gradually re-introduce a limited number of activities.

❖ **Don't be afraid to say "Enough!"**

Lisa M. Petsche is a mother of three, mental health worker and freelance writer.

Reformed identity: What's the problem? What's the point?

John Bolt

It's a familiar objection and refrain. Isn't it a mistake to focus so much attention on what it is that makes us distinctively Reformed? Isn't just being Christian the important thing, especially now that the religions of the world live next door to us? Furthermore, since we're told that the word "Reformed" fails to communicate today, wouldn't it be preferable simply to call ourselves "Pleasantville Community Church" rather than, let's say, "Not-so-pleasantville Christian Reformed Church"? By placing the focus on our Reformed identity don't we run the risk of idealizing and even idolizing a specific tradition? And, was pride in Christian Reformed distinctiveness perhaps even closely linked to ethnic Dutch identity, thus distorting the biblical doctrine of election and resulting in a smug exclusivism?

Well, yes and no. The artillery barrage in the opening paragraph does bring along some heavy-duty firepower. And while it may be true that some of the attack uses a battery of howitzers when a single musket would suffice, there are some legitimate targets in view. To use Jaroslav Pelikan's well-chosen contrast, a wholesome emphasis on tradition — the living faith of the dead — can and does lapse into traditionalism — the dead faith of the living. Furthermore, when our major foes are paganism, secularism, moral relativism, the culture of death and, yes, militant Islam – then Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, and even Roman Catholics need to be seen as our allies not our foes. Facing world terrorism, can we afford to be arguing about the real presence of Christ or inner-trinitarian relationships?

It may be helpful to consider this from a slightly different angle. It is not healthy to be obsessively preoccupied with personal self-identity; in fact it is neurotic. Constantly worrying "who am I?" prevents us from being able, as they say, to "get a life." Institutions too can be crippled, hindered from doing their task by institutional navel-gazing. If we are turned inward — curved in on ourselves, to use Augustine's language — we will not move outward. And that is serious because we are then incapable of love itself, unable to get beyond ourselves.

We travel down the road of identity self-examination with caution, therefore; with humility, aware of serious potholes ahead. Yet, travel the road we must for while we are unable to act if curved in on ourselves, the same is true if we have no clue who we are.

Let's extend the military metaphor used above, considering the North American church as involved in a situation of warfare, of spiritual conflict. "Onward Christian Soldiers" and all that. The analogy is simplest in a pre-modern battle situation where two armies each have artillery, cavalry and infantry. Armies drill regularly so that each member does its part efficiently and habitually; battlefields are not practice fields. Soldiers do not have the luxury of navel-gazing self-reflection: "Who am I?" "Where do I belong?" "What is my job?" Nor can they be effective if, in fever-pitch passion to destroy the enemy, they forget their specific tasks, just grab whatever is at hand and rush pell-mell out to slay the foe. In the fire of battle, identity confusion is a killer.

Or, a similar comparison, one that comes to mind to a lover of college football. Again, for football teams to be successful each player must do his clearly established function in a well-tuned machine. If 300-pound linemen get jealous of the glory and glamor that backs and wide receivers get and demand, "Give me the ball or I won't block anymore," well, we all know what happens. An amusing moment or two but no long-term team success.

I will resist the temptation to locate the Reformed tradition in either a specific military or football role. I simply want to point out that today, in North America, there are several dominant Christian traditions or ecclesiastical trends to which all others are slowly gravitating. Thanks in part to significant Hispanic immigration, Roman Catholic sacramental, institutional-hierarchical Christianity is growing, the priestly scandals notwithstanding. Mainline, liberal Protestantism appears to be waning, if not dying, though its social gospel emphasis has been picked up by progressive evangelicals, typified best perhaps by Jim Wallis and the "Sojourners" fellowship. The third major trend is clearly revivalist Christianity which today is best represented by a Baptist entrepreneurial church growth movement. Finally, there is Pentecostal Christianity of various kinds.

In that mix, a confessional tradition such as the Reformed or Lutheran has a hard time. North American church soil is not hospitable to confessional Christianity with its emphasis on truth rather than pragmatic success. The United States in particular is a thoroughly pragmatic, not to mention voluntarist or Arminian, society and culture. In the face of that challenge, it seems to me, we have begun drifting in the dominant directions of American Christianity. Roman Catholicism hardly seems an option — the "popish mass" and all that. But, some of our churches have taken on the distinctive traits of Pentecostal-Charismatic worship and practice (e.g., "spiritual warfare"), and the Social Justice department of the CRCNA is an active participant in progressive evangelical social action work. But the biggest drift, I believe, has been in our domestic missiology where we have adapted and adopted many of the values of Baptist entrepreneurial evangelicalism.

And herein lies the problem. Pose the question this way: Do Baptists become Roman Catholic sacramentalists, forsaking

continued *on p.17...*

Church signs

Morris N. Greidanus

The size of European church signs is amusing. A historic church built before the Reformation may have an eight by eight (inches!) wooden sign on it. It will be nicely varnished and say something like: " Ned. Herv. Kerk , Dienst 10 uur." No pastor's name, slogans; just the abbreviated church name and the time of the Sunday service. Not much of a sign, we think. But the building is often sign enough – and how!

On this continent church signs are more elaborate; we seem to need more explanation. Signs will state the name of the church, times of services, and usually the pastor's name. Some have an inviting line like " Visitors welcome". I saw one that said, " Visitors welcome, members expected." Others link the local church with denominational ministries as in "The church of the Lutheran Hour" or "The church of the Back to God Hour."

The pastor is not the only staff mentioned on signs. Someone discovered "Every member a minister" – it's seen here and there. A Hamilton area church of the Reformed family balances the name of the pastor with that of the organist (If they ever get praise teams, they'll need a much larger sign).

And there are large signs with a fixed message and some space for a changeable message. I was happy when First CRC in Grand Rapids got a sign with three lines to list our sermon topics or make announcements about special services, tutoring, or summer Bible school. But this extra space obviously tempts many to corny, silly, or near-blasphemous slogans. Churches can buy books with perky proverbs; there's probably an internet service with more help.

I read these signs avidly, hoping that some day I'll see a sentence that befits the gospel. Usually they are sappy or plain awful. If a barber wants to be cute and say, "We need your head in our business," that's fine to me. But I'd expect a church to do better than the easy puns of "We serve soul food," or "Seven days without prayer make one weak."

I recently saw the worst message I've met so far. On a sunny spring day this church encouraged passers-by with the line: "Warning: Exposure to the Son may prevent burning."

Wow! That much miscommunication packed into one line!

I guess that the idea was to connect with the sunny day and the need to wear sun screen. The "warning" is like the consumer warning on smokes and other hazardous products. But here it's an inverted invitation – a bit of a lie. Then we have the audible pun on "Son"/sun, so beloved in church names as well. And finally the somber "burning", borrowed from those who paint "the wages of sin is death" on bridges and mountain sides, or from churches without air conditioning who decorate their summer sign with "If you think it's hot now...."

Are such sayings to amuse members, or to invite unbelievers? If in-house amusement is the idea, why put it on the sign? If outreach is the aim, what unbeliever would see this as good news?

We sell the gospel short when we resort to silly and sappy slogans. We seem so desperate to attract attention – any old way. But we confess that we serve the Maker of heaven and earth, the Lord of the universe! We don't have to allude to him in sly or silly ways. We may speak of him with confidence. And after Pentecost we realize again that our witness does not depend on clever humor, or lack of it. "The Spirit goes before them (God's people on worldwide mission) and with them, convincing the world of sin and pleading the cause of Christ" says the CRC's Contemporary Testimony.

I think that some of these signs forget the greatness of our God and the work of the Spirit. So look around this summer as you travel near or far. Send me the best and worst slogans you've seen, care of CC., and in the fall we'll list the Top Ten and the Bottom Ten church sign messages.

Our address is: 1 Hiscott St.,
St. Catharines, ON L2R 1C7
or e-mail: journal@christiancourier.ca

Reformed Identity

...continued from p. 16

their congregational polity in order to become more attractive to Hispanic immigrants who may be more comfortable with a more authoritarian, hierarchical form of church government? Have Roman Catholics adapted to the dominant North American voluntarist culture by forsaking Rome? Does a leopard change its spots?

Why then should the Christian Reformed church become another Baptist, evangelical, congregational church? The issue here is not simple survival, self-preservation. Even if the CRCNA, God forbid, dies, the gates of hell will not prevail.

The proper question is this: Will there be significant loss for the Kingdom of Christ, for the witness of the gospel itself, if the Reformed faith becomes extinct in North America?

I am fully convinced that it would be an incredible loss. Think of the doctrines of grace; of the covenant and kingdom; of the emphasis on God alone being the author of salvation, without any human help; of the crucial distinction between the church institute and organism; of a piety born in the crucibles of Reformation creeds and the struggles of the church to come to grips with the identity of Christ as divine and human; of worship grounded in covenant renewal. And, of course, there is the crucial role of a Reformed worldview for the whole enterprise of Christian education from kindergarten to graduate school. The matter of Reformed identity is important for the witness of the gospel in North America and, considering the importance of North America for the world, vital to the cause of truth and liberty over the entire globe.

Common cause against world terrorism? Of course. But Reformed Christianity, what Professor Nick Wolterstorff has called "world-transformative Christianity," is crucial in that cause. Reformed identity? That's the problem; that's the point.

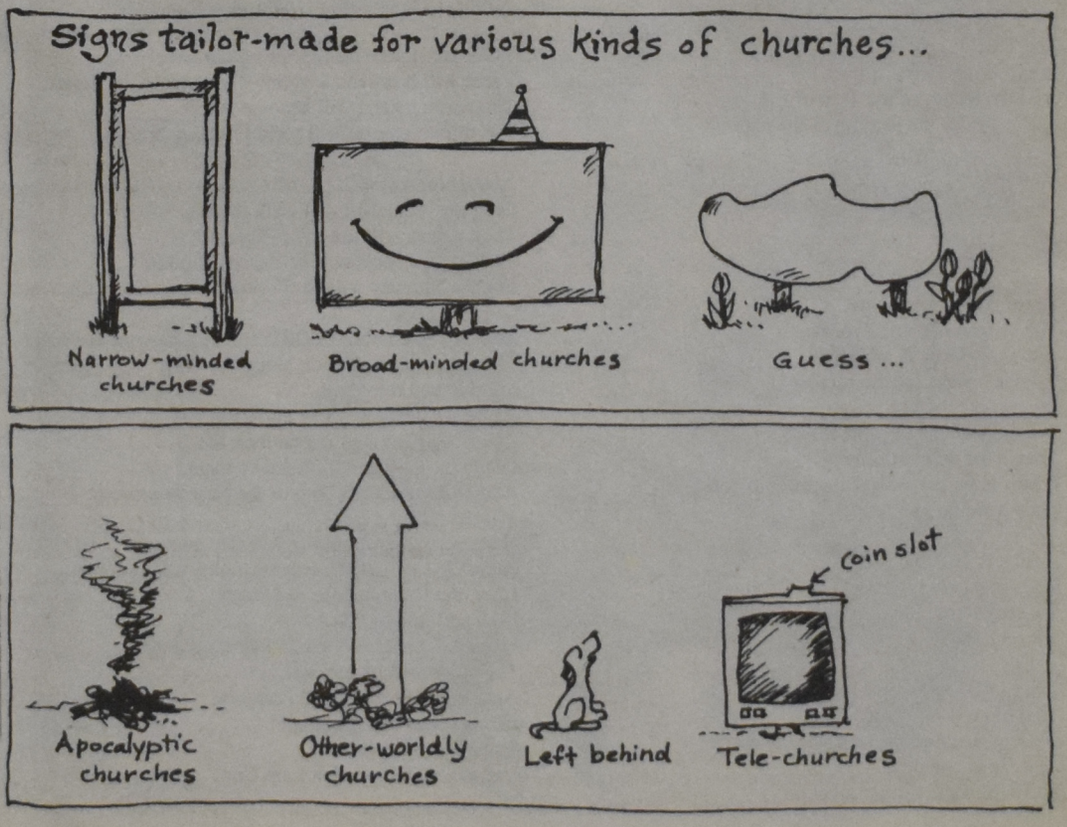
Study shows United Methodist ads successfully encourage church visits

(Religion Today) A recent study by The Barna Research Group indicates The United Methodist Church's national television advertising and paid media campaign is successfully encouraging people to visit a local church.

The study has concluded that people who saw the United Methodist Church's Igniting Ministry advertisements in 2002 are twice as likely to visit a local congregation as those who did not. Forty-six percent of the target audience who had seen the ads said they are willing to visit a United Methodist church, a gain of 10 points over 2001.

"Being exposed to the advertising translates to greater likelihood to visit a church," said the Rev. Larry Hollon of United Methodist Communications.

Sixty-three percent of those surveyed reporting having seen the advertising on television. The ads run during three periods each year on national cable networks. Additional local TV placements, and other media placements, newspaper, outdoor and radio, reflect local church participation in the campaign.



Litany

Be still and know that I am God.

No Peace

See, there is turmoil here.
Nation rises against nation,
And kingdom rises against kingdom.

The nations conspire,
The peoples plot and scheme
The kings of the earth gather together
And the rulers take their stand
Against the Most High.

Yet we say this:
"The LORD reigns!
He will rebuke the nations in His time.
God will not be mocked."

Nations are in an uproar!
Kingdoms fall away!
But God will make wars to cease
To the ends of the earth.
The LORD will break the bow,
He will shatter the spear.

Yes, God will be exalted among the nations.
God will be exalted in all the earth.

At that time,
The LORD will judge between the nations.
The LORD will settle disputes for the peoples.

And the peoples will beat
Their swords into ploughshares
And their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
Nor will they train for war anymore.

The Tree of Life will grow
Along the River of Life that flows
From the throne of God and the Lamb.
The Tree of Life will bud.
It will bring crops of fruit.
And the leaves of the Tree of Life
are for the healing of the nations.

So now—
"Be still and know that I am God".

No Justice

There is no justice here.
The orphan has no advocate,
And the widow is left alone.
No one speaks for the refugee.

See the tears of the oppressed!
They have no comforter.
Power is on the side of their oppressors.
They have no comforter!

Justice is far from us.
Righteousness is beyond our reach.
We seek light but we drown in darkness.
We seek the dawn but we linger in the shadows.

The LORD looks and He is displeased
That there is no justice.
He sees that there is no one to intervene
And He is appalled.
So He himself works salvation.

The LORD says:

"I will be a father to the fatherless
And I will defend the widows.
I will set the lonely in families
And provide a land to the desolate.
I will lead forth the prisoners with singing."

The LORD himself will restore justice in the land!
So now—
"Be still and know that I am God."

Creation in Tumult

See, creation groans in childbirth.
There are famines and earthquakes.
The earth gives way, and
The mountains fall into the heart of the sea.
The mighty tide rises, and
The foundations of the earth shudder and shake.

The earth has been defiled by its people:
They have disobeyed the laws,
Violated the statutes, and
Broken the everlasting covenant.
Therefore a curse consumes the earth.

The earth dries up and withers.
It languishes and groans under the curse.
The earth is broken up.
It is split asunder.
The weight of sin breaks all creation down to its core.

Yet we have this hope:
The LORD will create a new heaven and a new earth.
The desert and the parched land will be glad;
The wilderness will rejoice and blossom—
Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom.
All the earth will rejoice and shout for joy.

Water will gush forth in the wilderness,
There will be streams of flowing water in the desert.
The burning sand will become a pool,
The thirsty ground will yield bubbling springs.

And a highway will be there called the Way of Holiness.
Only the redeemed will walk there.
The unclean will not travel upon it,
And wicked fools will be banned from it.
For the highway will be for those who walk in the Way.

The redeemed of the LORD shall journey on the Way.
The ransomed will walk along the Way,
Singing and rejoicing,
As they dance their way into Zion.
Everlasting joy will crown their heads.
Gladness and joy will overtake them,
And will mark their path to the New Jerusalem.

Here, sorrow and sighing will flee away.
Here, God will wipe away the tears of his people.
Here, the River of Life will flow,
Rich and full, it will flow
From the throne of God and of the Lamb.
The curse will be broken.
And God will restore His creation
He will rest with his people.
So now—
"Be still and know that I am God."

The Wicked Prosper

See how our adversaries have increased!
Many rise against us!
Many say of us:
"Their God will not deliver them!"

The wicked laugh in their arrogance.
They hunt down the weak,
They boast of their sin,
They congratulate the greedy,
They revile the LORD.
They say,
"There is no God!"

The wicked are proud—
Too proud for God!
There is no room left in their hearts
For God.
The wicked speak only curses and lies and threats.
They sneer at the righteous.
They say:
"Where is your God?"

See the prosperity of the wicked!
They have no struggles!
Their bodies are healthy and strong!
Their hearts are callous.
The evil conceits of their minds
Know no limits.
They say, "Nothing can shake us!
We will never have trouble!
We do not need God!"

We live among lions.
We are stalked and opposed
Because we name Christ.
Our brothers and sisters
Are persecuted and put to death.
The Church is hated by all nations
Just as Christ was hated before us.

False prophets appear and deceive the people.
Many have turned away from the faith.
There are scoffers who follow their own desires
And seek to divide the Church with their chatter.
Many betray and hurt those they once loved.
The wicked rear their heads.
Their hatred burns against the chosen of Christ.

We are called out of the world by Christ.
Our LORD says:
"You will weep and mourn while the world rejoices.
You will grieve but your grief will turn to joy.
Now is your time of pain.
But I will see you again.
I will return for you.
Then you will rejoice
And no one will take away your joy!"

Our LORD says:
"In this world you will have trouble.
But fear not!
I have overcome the world!"

Therefore—
"Be still and know that I am God."

Theresa Miedema is a former Bay Street lawyer now practicing parttime while completing a graduate degree at the U. of Toronto.

Three dimensions of the same-sex 'marriage' issue

Jonathan Chaplin

The letter from the Council of Transcona CRC, Winnipeg is a considered challenge to the Committee for Contact with the Government's (CCG) recent statements on same-sex unions and deserves a considered response. I suggest we must distinguish three questions in this debate. The first is the *political and legal* question of how the state should respond to the existence of same-sex relationships in our society. The second is the *moral* question of the legitimacy of same-sex relationships. The third is the *ecclesial and pastoral* question of how the church should respond to the presence of people in same-sex (sexual) relationships in its midst.

1. The political and legal question

The letter suggests that Canada faces a choice between the 'Judeo-Christian ethic' and 'pluralism.' But is this an adequate way to describe the choice facing the Canada (or the church) today? True, at one time, the Judeo-Christian ethic was indeed the most influential public ethic in Canada, bringing blessings to Canadian society which Christians should protect. I would also agree that such an ethic, rightly understood, is the surest foundation for 'true justice and the rule of law' in any nation.

But the cultural influence this ethic exercised in the past depended in part on a position of constitutional privilege which is, I think, incompatible with a Christian view of the limits of the state. The state lacks the legal authority to declare itself on confessional matters, or favor one confession over another. If so, then it may not *officially* declare a preference for a Judeo-Christian ethic.

However, this does *not* mean that it is illegitimate for those who support this ethic to use democratic channels to advance the influence of such an ethic on the state. Christians are equally entitled to use their citizen's rights to campaign for laws which they believe, on Christian grounds, are best for the public good of the nation.

Legal protection is not moral approval

The same point about the limits of the state also applies to many areas of moral conduct. The state rightly does not legally proscribe many cases of immoral (and often destructive) conduct: adultery, pornography, drunkenness, excessive consumption, environmental damage, for example. This is evidence that it knows its limits: it cannot create virtue or compel right conduct in all spheres of life. Its task is to enforce public justice – that is, justice only within the public realm, not within every realm.

There is a legitimate debate about what public justice requires in regard to same-sex relationships. The CCG statements judge that it is within the state's public justice competence both to uphold the longstanding legal definition of marriage as heterosexual, *and* to provide necessary legal protection for the public, civil interests of people involved in committed homosexual relationships and vulnerable to various kinds of harm. I think they are right on both counts, but I acknowledge that other views are legitimate.

Defining what counts as 'necessary' is not an easy matter. Like CCG, I do not think this means a package of legal rights and duties *identical to* ('equal' to) those currently enjoyed by heterosexual married couples, since this fails to do justice to the real difference in the character and public significance of the two kinds of relationship. Nor does it mean legally redefining marriage to include same-sex relationships (which, regrettably, is now about to happen, but is a case of the state *exceeding* its limits). Among the options canvassed by the CCG, my own strong preference would have been for the 'registered domestic partnership,' including but not at all confined to same-sex couples (indeed not defined as conjugal at all), rather than the 'civil union' which is intended specifically for same-sex couples and confers virtually identical legal status as marriage.

But in offering such public legal protection to vulnerable parties in same-sex relationships, the state is not necessarily morally approving same-sex relationships, nor is it necessarily expressing moral indifference about them. Equally, when the state offers legal protection for the vulnerable parties in heterosexual divorce, it is not morally approving divorce; and nor is it morally approving consumerism when it legally protects the freedom to engage in excessive shopping. The CCG's case for a 'just pluralism' is not based on an argument for a secular, neutral, or morally relativist state, but only for a just and limited state.

2. The moral question

So it is possible to defend something like CCG's stance on the legal protection of same-sex (sexual) relationships, without at all implying moral or theological endorsement of such relationships. Today, many Christians advance arguments in favor of recognizing the equal moral or theological status of committed, permanent homosexual relationships with heterosexual marriage. Or, if the argument is not for equal moral status, then it is for acknowledging the moral right of individuals to make that choice for themselves. Others (including me) are not persuaded by those arguments and continue to believe that the church should uphold the norm of heterosexual monogamy as the exclusive context for the enjoyment of sexual union.

Nevertheless, I believe those holding this view should treat with respect those who sincerely hold opposing views on the basis of a conscientious reading of Scripture. Different individuals, denominations and local congregations are coming to differing conclusions on this, and different denominations will have different ways of addressing those conflicts.

Tragically, divisions are likely to ensue as adherents of different views each sincerely follow what they believe the Spirit is saying to the churches. I see no way of preventing painful personal and institutional ruptures entirely. But a deep commitment to mutual respect and patient dialogue, coupled with a humble awareness that we all stand before the face of a God whom we now see only in part, may at least mitigate that pain and, perhaps, contain the ruptures.

3. The ecclesial and pastoral question

For some church communities, what this may require is more respect for those holding the 'traditional' view: not silencing, belittling or patronizing them – or worse, suspecting or even openly accusing them of 'homophobia' for merely holding that view. But for most it will probably require, above all, a much greater willingness to enter into the experiences of their homosexual brothers and sisters; to listen with compassion to their stories of fear, prejudice and exclusion; to respect their struggles for biblical integrity and personal wholeness in the face of enormous inner turmoil, loneliness and cultural pressure; to acknowledge that some permanent homosexual relationships are better examples of companionship and fidelity than some heterosexual ones.

And in listening, they will undoubtedly have learned something about the meaning of grace and faithfulness in our demanding and disorienting times. For what many churches believe gay and lesbian people are called to – a costly life of celibacy – can only be lived through an outpouring of grace. Our churches are called to be(come) openhearted agents of such grace for our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters in Christ, just as we wish that they be agents of grace for all of us with our own particular struggles. Some Christians may fear that such a stance will be a slippery slope into moral compromise. For many gay and lesbian people, however, it may be the only thing that keeps them within the church, or, perhaps, within the faith.

Jonathan Chaplin is professor of political theory at ICS and is completing a book on pluralism, society and the state. He is, among other things, a member of the Board of the Public Justice Resource Centre, the Social Action Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, the Advisory Council of the Dooyeweerd Centre for Christian Philosophy, and the Distinguished Advisory Panel of the "Civitas Program" based at the Center for Public Justice in Washington, D.C.

WHAT MAKES EDITORS THINK THAT I WANT TO SEE GUYS KISSING EVERY TIME I OPEN A PAPER? AT THE RISK OF SOUNDING LIKE A HOMOPHOBE, IT KIND OF OFFENDS ME...
WAIT UNTIL YOU SEE THE HONEYMOON PICTURES ON PAGE 17.
SAME-SEX WEDDINGS ALL THE RAGE
Ottawa Citizen
Caglecartoons.com

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Classified Rates

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION
Christian Courier is published on alternate Mondays. Copy deadline for each issue is 9 a.m. Tuesday, 13 days prior to publication date.
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For Rent

St. Catharines - Share house with Christian young person. Ideal for students. Available August 1, 2003. On bus route and close to Fairview Mall. Call Anita at: 905-684-5806 or Ineke at 905-937-3314.

I have a **2 bedroom basement apt.** to rent. Location: **Rexdale** (north Toronto-west end) and it is available July 7th. Utilities are included in the 900.00/mo rent. Non-smokers, no pets. Contact me at my home # **(416) 251-6649**.

Personals

Widow seeks companion:
Dutch-Canadian Christian widow, living in S.W. Ontario would like to meet a Christian gentleman between ages 70 -75 to share future with, and serve the Lord together.
Please reply to: **File 2739, 1 Hiscott St. St. Catharines ON L2R 1C7**

"Hi A.D." If you responded to **File No. 2735** a few months ago and are still interested, please send another letter. (Sorry, the letter was misplaced.) *(29 year-old Christian female seeking male who has strong Christian values.)*
Reply to: **File 2735, 1 Hiscott St. St. Catharines ON L2R 1C7**

Handsome, fit man (50) seeks a woman as a helpmeet who yearns for wholeness. I am a professional who enjoys the arts, the outdoors and domestic pleasures. Tell me about your family and tell me what you value. Direct all correspondence to **quest@ca.inter.net.**

Birthday

Tzum, The Netherlands Lacombe, Alberta
1903 July 13 2003

"Because of the Lord's great love
we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."
Lamentations 3:22-24

We thank and praise God for His love and faithfulness in the life of our father, grandfather, and great-grandfather as we celebrate his **100th Birthday.**

Frank Wassenaar

Happy Birthday Pake!
Your loving children:
Bill & Audrey Noordhof
Jim & Willma Kluyt
Peter & Dorothey Hansum
John & Wilma Busaan
And your grandchildren and great-grandchildren

Wedding

With praise and thankfulness to our God,
we, Adrian & Jean Van Geest and John & Nel Groen,
wish to announce the forthcoming wedding of our children

Annette Joanne Van Geest
and
James Peter Groen

The wedding will take place, D.V. on July 26, 2003 at 11 a.m.,
in the Faith CRC of Burlington, Ontario
with the fathers,
Rev. Adrian A. Van Geest and Rev. John G. Groen officiating.

Future address:
17 Hurdman Rd, Ottawa ON K1N 8N7

Anniversaries

1968 Grand Rapids, Michigan July 10 Chatham, Ontario 2003

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."
Proverbs 3:5,6

With praise and thanksgiving to God, we joyfully announce the **35 th Wedding Anniversary** of our parents

PAUL AND LINDA STADT (nee DeVries)

Love from your children,
Sara & Jim Boss, *Frankfort IL*
Brian & Andrea Draijer, *Waterloo ON*

Join us in an **Open House Celebration** on Saturday, July 12 from 2 - 4 p.m.
at the First Christian Reformed Church of Chatham
(25 Tweedsmuir Ave East).
Best Wishes only, please.

Home Address: 85 Lynnwood Avenue, RR 4 Chatham ON N7M 5J4

Anniversaries

1953 Drayton, Ontario July 31 St. Catharines, Ontario 2003

GERRY AND SWANSEA FLUIT (nee Steenbergen)

Psalm 121
With praise and thanksgiving to God
we congratulate our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents
on their **50th Wedding Anniversary.**
We pray that the Lord will continue to keep you in His loving care.
With love from your children, grandchildren & great-grandchild:
Louis Fluit & Lori Melanson, *Beamsville*
Philip, Jacqueline, Christopher, Nicole, (Kayla), Kelsey, David
Marcia & Wayne deJong - Janine, Sarah, Mark, *Hamilton*
Andrew & Brenda Fluit - Tanya, Sabrina, *Niagara-on-the-Lake*
Robert Fluit & Donna Speranzini - Blake, *Vineland*

An **Open House** will be held Saturday August 9, 2003 from 2 - 4 p.m. at
Covenant Christian Reformed Church, 278 Parnell Rd.
St. Catharines, Ontario. *Best Wishes only.*
Home address: 39 Wakelin Terrace, St. Catharines ON L2M 4K7

Dan & Mary Vriend

With thankfulness to God
for his love and blessings,
we are pleased to announce the
50th Wedding Anniversary
of our parents and grandparents:

DAN AND MARY VRIEND

Congratulations and Love from the families of:
Richard Vriend & Jo-Ann Tavenier-Vriend
Ben & Leanne Vriend
Ken & Denise Vriend
Calvin & Audrey Vriend
Anne & Robin Koning

There will be an **OPEN HOUSE** on
Sat., July 5, from 2 - 4 p.m. at the
First Christian Reformed Church
10956 - 96 St., Edmonton, Alberta

Mailing Address: 3634 - 112 Ave.
Edmonton AB Canada T5W 0M4

1953 Sarnia, Ontario June 4 St. Catharines, Ontario 2003

With thankfulness to God
for his love and blessing
we rejoice with our parents,

Rev.JOHN AND PAULA VAN DYK

on the celebration of their
50th Wedding Anniversary.
We pray that God
will continue to be with you
and bless you
for many more years.
With all our love:
Karen Van Dyke, *St. Catharines*
Mike & Barb Vandyk, *Taber AB*
David, Steven Paul

Address: 413 Linwell Rd Unit 36
St Catharines ON L2M 7Y2

Paula & John Van Dyk

Obituary

The Lord took home peacefully
in her sleep on May 3, 2003

PATRICIA (PIETJE) WENDEL
(nee Van Hoorn)

Beloved husband for 55 years:
Charlie (Tunnis) Wendel
Beloved mother of:
Janette & Klaas Hoekstra, *Lemmer*
Joanne & Hans Broekhuisen, *Veldhoven*
Charlie & Mary Ann Wendel, *Wellandport*
Margaret & John Bakkeren, *Brampton*
Dear grandmother & great-grandmother of:
Petra - Harm, Tim, Matijs, Mayke
Natasha & Gerard - Gea
John, Karl, Susannne, Sander,
Linda, Timothy, Elizabeth,
Jaclyn & Jeff - Jacob
Christopher, Pieter
Dear sister of:
Janna & Kees (†) van der Velde-van Hoorn, *Brampton*
Grietje (†) & Geert van Wieren-van Hoorn, *Drachten*
Mientje & Tamme (†) Storteboom-van Hoorn, *Grootegast*
Wietske & Siete de Jong-van Hoorn, *Grootegast*
Hendrik (†) & Siepie van Hoorn-Veen, *Marum*
Marten & Ann van Hoorn-Vlaar, *Smithville*
Aafke & Ale Klaver-van Hoorn, *Grootegast*
Geeske van Hoorn (†)
Dear sister-in-law of:
Lammert & Ali Wendel-Veninga, *Roden*
Bertus & Tiny Wendel-Koenes, *Leek*
And all the nieces and nephews
in Canada and in the Netherlands.

A memorial service was held at
Holland Christian Homes in Brampton on
Tuesday May 6th, 2003 at 2:30 p.m.
Rev. H. Praamsma officiating

Death is not the end, it is only the passing from time into eternity for the Child of God.

Classifieds

Job Opportunities	Miscellaneous

YOUTH DIRECTOR/HALF TIME:

WANTED, a loyal servant, who is gifted in youth ministries and whose love for God and His people is present in his/her everyday walk. This self-motivated and enthusiastic person will use his/her gifts to direct, lead and motivate today's young people into tomorrow's leaders. This position at St. Thomas First CRC will be available in July 2003.

For further information or to send your resume, contact

Youth Director Search,
First CRC,
PO Box 22039
204 First Ave
St. Thomas, ON N5R 6A1 or
email: firstcrcstthomas@canada.com

YOUTH DIRECTOR/PASTOR

The three Christian Reformed Churches of **Sarnia**, Ontario are seeking a **full time Youth Director/Pastor** to continue a unique and exciting combined youth ministry. Solid programming & commiteed volunteer leadership is already in place. Candidate must have strong relational and administrative skills plus the desire and ability to lead and equip our youth, helping them to grow in faith and service to our Lord.

Please send resume and inquiries to:

Art Capelle,
2261Confederation, Sarnia, Ontario, N7T-7H3,
519-337-4660 or email: artc@rivernet.net

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- writer's page - interested in writing for the CC.? - some guidelines
- reader's forum -connect with other readers
- community events
- links of interest

The van Ruler series **"Why go to Church"** is also on our web under feature articles.
New CC for the visually impaired-can be accessed from your home computer.
Ask us for more information.

The Ministry to Seafarers sponsored by the Christian Reformed Churches of British Columbia invites applications for a full time

Ministry to Seafarers Chaplain

to serve in the Port of Vancouver, BC, Canada

The Christian Reformed Churches in British Columbia have long sponsored a ministry to seafarers who visit the Port of Vancouver. This ministry has been in existence for over 30 years and plays a key role in an ecumenical outreach to over 15,000 seafarers annually from over 75 different countries who come through our ports. Due to the retirement of Rev. Simon Wolfert, the Ministry to Seafarers Committee is seeking to find another chaplain who can give leadership to this vibrant ministry.

We are looking for a Christian with a strong commitment to the Reformed faith;

- Is self motivated and able to work within a team setting,
- Has theological training, though ordination as a Minister of the Word is not a prerequisite.
- Has experience in cross cultural missions
- Has experience working pastorally with a wide variety of people.
- Innovative in finding new approaches to connect this ministry with the supporting constituency
- Is able to relate well to religious and ethnically diverse groups of seafarers who visit the Ministry Center
- Is physically able to visit on board ships
- Is able to nurture healthy working relationships with other volunteers and is committed to fostering ecumenical partnerships with other denominations who share in this ministry at the Flying Angel Club (Ministry Center)

A job description is available upon request. Please send a letter of application, a complete resume, two reference letters as well as a brief outline of a personal vision for this Ministry to Seafarers to:

Mrs. Githa De Groot
#152 - 32691 Garibaldi Drive
Abbotsford, BC V2T 5T7
Email: johngitha@shaw.ca
Deadline for applications to be considered is September 1, 2003

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For information contact us
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by email pastoralexcellence@crcna.org
or visit www.crcna.org/pastoralexcellence

Made possible in the Christian Reformed Church through a grant from Lilly Endowment Inc.

Advertising/Business Directory

Scottish church elder appointed to count the silverware

By Cedric Pulford

London (ENI)—Kirkpatrick Dobie, a Church of Scotland elder, has started a 10-year project to record every item of communion and baptismal ware.

The project was launched because of the importance of the collection for Scotland's national heritage.

A specialist in silver, the 62-year-old Dobie is semi-retired, and he works on the project one day a week. He has found the value of communion and baptismal ware – in silver, pewter and electro-plated nickel silver – ranges from "practically nothing" to over $200,000 per church.

A silver plate from the 17th century shows somebody kneeling beside the communion table - an apparent reference to an unsuccessful attempt by King James VI of Scotland (who also ruled England as James I) to enforce the Anglican practice of kneeling.

Among the Kirk's greatest treasures is the silver "Mary Cup," a communion cup traditionally associated with Mary, Queen of Scots, who was crowned queen of Scotland in 1543, but was executed by English monarch Elizabeth I in 1587.

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NEW.. NEW.. NEW.. NEW..

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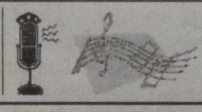

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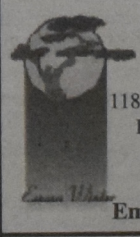

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ATTENTION Subscribers and Advertisers!
Our **summer schedule** has been adjusted.

Issue Dates	Deadlines
July 28	July 2
Aug. 11	July 29
Aug 25	Aug.12
Sep. 8	Aug. 26
Sep 22	Sep 9

Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Items appearing in this column are run free of charge if they advertise an admission-free event, if they accompany an ad for the same event, or at the discretion of CC. In case of free listing, space limitations apply. The charge otherwise is $7.50 per line, or $1.50 per 1/3 line, per insertion

July 7 **London, ON** The Royal Canadian College of Organists (London Centre) presents **Jonathan Oldengarm** in concert. Trinity Lutheran Church, 146 Colborne St., 8:00 PM. Information:519-432-4832.

July 12 **Wieringermeerdag** 10 a.m. in **Stratford** on Queens Park Drive. Potluck lunch. Phone 519-631-6234 for more information.

Oct 10-14 The **Transcona** CRC (Winnipeg, Manitoba) will be celebrating its 50th Anniversary with praise, thanksgiving & fellowship. For info call: Bev Steendam at 204-853-2150 or jsteenda@mts.net

Oct 11,12 First CRC, **Guelph**, Ont. 50th anniversary. Celebrations include childrens programs, Social, Banquet. See September issue for more details.

Dec 5, 6,7 **Bethel** CRC **of Lacombe, Alberta**, 50th anniversary - weekend of praise, thanksgiving and fellowship All former and present members and friends are invited. For info, call: Eleanor Wildeboer at 403-782-2602 or e-mail wilelwildeboer@aol.com (See ad Mar 17 issue)

Great gift idea!!

The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has recently made available to the Canadian Embassy a video production entitled **"The Netherlands and The House of Orange"**. It tells the history of the Netherlands through the eyes of this remarkable family.

To find out more, contact:

Rosemieke van de Meerendonk
Press and Cultural Affairs
Royal Netherlands Embassy Ottawa
E-mail:
rosemieke_vande.meerendonk@minbuza.nl

Attention!! The next issue of the Christian Courier will be **July 28**. There will be three weeks between issues to allow for a staff break.

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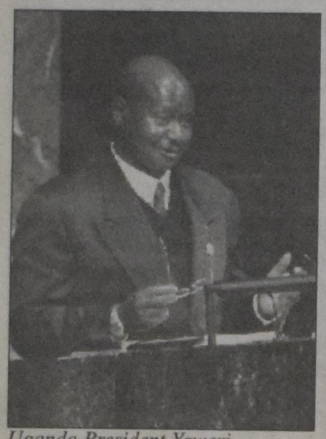
Uganda: Lord's Resistance Army ordered to target the Church.

Elizabeth Kendal

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is a blasphemous, cult-militia that has been terrorizing the predominantly Christian population of northern Uganda for the past seventeen years in order to force concessions from the Ugandan government.



Uganda President Yoweri Museveni at the U.N.

The LRA claims it wants to establish a theocratic government based on the Ten Commandments. It is, therefore, not uncommon to hear the secular media referring to the LRA as a "fundamentalist Christian" group. Yet, the signature trademarks of the LRA are torture and maiming – such as the chopping off of hands, lips, noses and ears – as well as rape, kidnap, murder and the cruelest, most degrading torments – horrors so shocking they are unspeakable.

Escalation of terror

An escalation of LRA hostility led the Ugandan government to launch a military offensive against the LRA in March 2002. In spite of the fact that the LRA presently consists of only around 3,000 soldiers including hundreds of abducted child soldiers, the Ugandan military's "Operation Iron Fist" has failed to curb LRA terror; rather, the terror has escalated. In fact, Father Joseph Gerner of Saint Joseph's Mission in Kitgum says, "The rebels are all over. I would say practically the whole countryside is in their hands."

While more than 20,000 children have been abducted by the LRA for use as child soldiers and sex-slaves in the past 17 years, more than 5,000 of these have been taken since June 2002.

The church carries most of the burden of this suffering. Christian missions and aid organizations provide care and counseling for escaped and rescued child soldiers and assist with their reintegration back into society. The missions also run orphanages, schools and clinics, and provide safe havens for children afraid of being abducted. This is no small task. For example, over 5,000 people are presently seeking refuge at St Joseph's Mission in Kitgum, and Noah's Ark Children's Ministry Uganda (NACMU) in Gulu takes in hundreds of children each night.

As the LRA has waged war on the government of Uganda, the church has been the primary sustainer of society and protector of civilians, as well as the primary peace-broker. Now however, the LRA has declared war on the church.

LRA ordered to target the church

Joseph Kony, leader of the LRA, has been using radio equipment stolen from Catholic missions to communicate with his soldiers. As this equipment is set to a specific mission frequency, other Catholic missions have been picking up the transmissions. On June 14 Kony was heard giving this order to his troops: "Catholic missions must be destroyed, priests and missionaries killed in cold blood and nuns beaten black and blue."

The Ugandan Army also picked up the transmission and has confirmed it as authentic. An escaped child-soldier also corroborated the order.

This is a radical shift in the LRA's attitude to the church. Previously the LRA had been willing to place its trust in Acholi religious leaders to broker peace negotiations. Most Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative representatives are from the Catholic Church. Father Joseph Gerner of the Catholic parish in Kitgum said that Kony's recent statements had revealed a very worrying shift in the LRA's rhetoric. "This is very strange, this change, given that before it was only the Catholic Church they said they would trust."

The Roman Catholic archbishop of the northern Ugandan town of Gulu, John-Baptist Odama said, "I'm only wondering why, suddenly, it has switched and changed into a religious war targeting specifically the Catholic Church and particularly the leaders of the Catholic Church, like the priests, the religious nuns."

Father Carlos Rodriguez, a Catholic priest in Gulu who is involved in the Peace Initiative, explained that several commanders deserted the LRA during recent peace meetings with church officials and the LRA is furious. Rodriguez says the LRA has since 'burned, bombed and desecrated churches on nine occasions'.

Recent LRA raids

On May 11, 50 LRA militiamen broke into a Catholic Seminary, killing one and abducting 44 young seminarians, though three later escaped. Another four are confirmed hacked to death by the LRA when they could no longer walk after being tortured. The remaining 37 seminarians are still missing.

Even the nearly one million Ugandans who have been forced into refugee camps by the LRA rebellion are not safe from the endless terror. On June 5 the LRA clubbed 13 civilians to death in Pabbo Camp north of Gulu. In the early hours of Sunday 15 June, they attacked villages in Lira and Arpac districts, committing their signature atrocities – slashing faces and cutting off hands. At least eight people aged 6 to 61 died from machete wounds. Hundreds of homes were torched, and nearly 100 children were abducted for use as child-soldiers and sex-slaves.

Since then, the LRA have raided two camps for Internally Displaced People and murdered a Catholic priest (June 17). On June 18 around 3 a.m. they raided the Redeem Children's Home, an orphanage for girls run by the Sacred Heart Sisters, and kidnaped 15 Sudanese and Ugandan girls aged between 7 - 15 yrs. A military battalion rescued 6 girls, 9 are still missing. Later that same day the LRA attacked a group of nuns in Gulu.

Church leaders appeal to UN for help

Ugandan and Sudanese religious leaders on June 13 called on the UN Security Council and other bodies to intervene in the conflict in northern Uganda as a way of protecting civilians and bringing an end to the 17-year-old conflict.

"We are sounding a strong appeal to the UN to address the conflict in northern Uganda so that all necessary measures are put in place for the protection of the civilians," the Roman Catholic Church said in a statement after a three-day meeting in Gulu.

"We appeal to various international bodies, heads of diplomatic missions, the East African Community, African Union, European Union, Inter-Governmental Authority on Development and Arab League to support our proposal," the statement said.

Elizabeth Kendal is the Principal Researcher and Writer for the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission (WEA RLC). This article was supplemented with information from other news sources.

News Digest

Film about Christ draws charges of anti-Semitism

The Passion a $25 million movie directed by Mel Gibson that depicts the last 12 hours of the life of Jesus Christ with the entire dialogue spoken in Latin and Aramaic created a lot of controversy.

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) charges that the movie will produce a fresh round of anti-Semitism. After seeing an early draft of the script the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops also objected to the film.

A spokesman for the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, however, said that the attacks on the film are hypocritical.

"If you made a movie blaspheming Christ, you wouldn't hear a word," said Louis Giovino, spokesman for the Catholic League.

Gibson's Icon Productions is paying for the film, which is dedicated to authenticity by featuring only the Latin and Aramaic dialogue with no English subtitles.

Some bishops and the ADL had formed an ad hoc group of biblical scholars of nine Christian and Jewish academics that issued an 18-page report critical of Gibson's movie.

Chief among the group's complaints about the film was a concern that "a graphic movie presentation of the crucifixion could reawaken the very anti-Semitic attitudes that we have devoted our careers to combating."

The ADL sought assurances from Gibson that the film "will not give rise to the old canard of charging Jews with deicide and to anti-Semitism."

Icon Productions objected to the critiques, saying they were all based on the unauthorized theft of the draft.

Gibson responded to the allegations of anti-Semitism by saying, "The Passion is a movie meant to inspire, not offend. My intention in bringing it to the screen is to create a lasting work of art and engender serious thought among audiences of diverse faith backgrounds."